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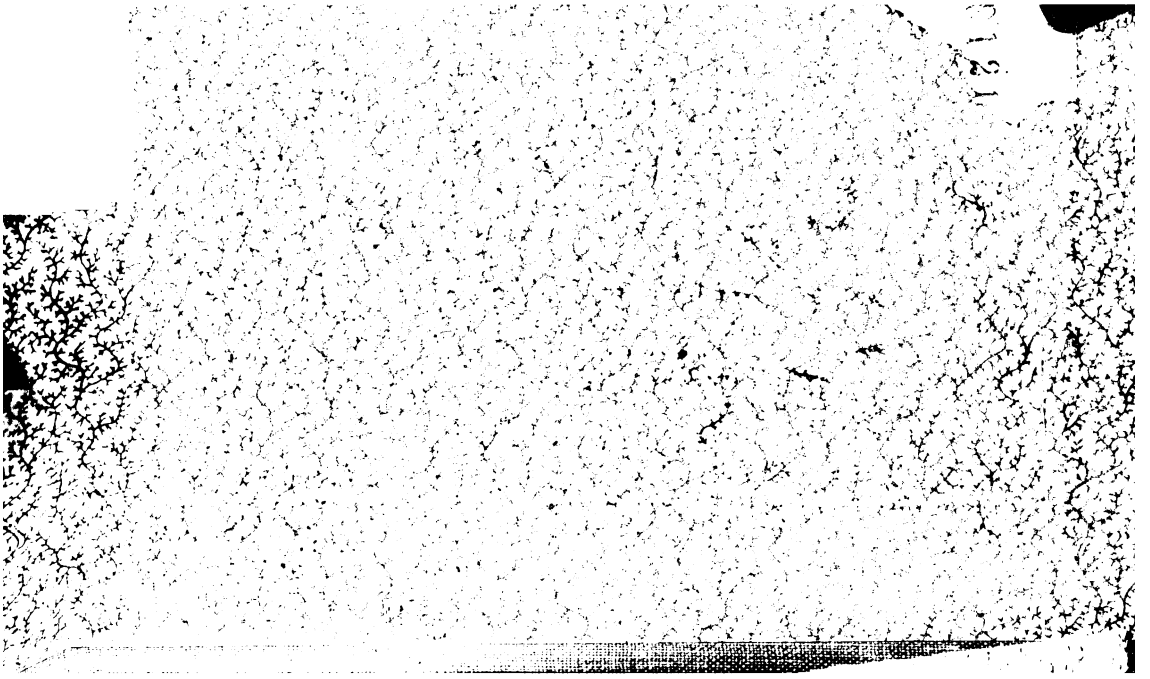

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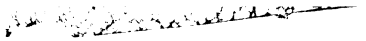

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THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE.

BY

E. F. BENSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

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THE
HOUSE OF DEFENCE

BY

E. F. BENSON

AUTHOR OF "DODO," "THE CHALLONERS," "THE IMAGE IN THE SAND," "THE ANGEL OF PAIN," "PAUL," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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DEDICATION

TO

C. E. M.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is with your permission that I dedicate this book to you, and with your permission and by your desire that I explain the circumstances of its dedication. You were cured, as both you and I know, of a disease that medical science had pronounced incurable by a certain Christian Science healer, who used neither knife nor drugs upon you.

I, a layman in medical affairs, think, as you know, that your disease was nervous in origin, and you will readily admit that the wise and skilful man who figures here as Sir James thought the same. But it was already organic when you went to him, and, after consultation with others, he pronounced it incurable. At the same time, he acknowledged its nervous origin, and you will acknowledge that with the utmost frankness he confessed entire inability to say *how* a nervous affection entered the more obviously material world of organic trouble. He had instances in plenty: fear, anxiety, he said, affected circulation and digestion, and that, of course, is patent to everybody. So, too, is the cure: remove the anxiety or fear, and you will get gastric affairs to go smoothly again, *unless* organic trouble has begun.

I suppose it is because we are all so used to that sort of mental healing (do not contradict me yet) that we no longer see any mystery attaching to it. But in such a cure there is no doubt whatever that the mind acts on the body, even as it acted before, when fear produced the imperfect action of the digestion, and heals just as it hurt. To go a step farther, I see no reason why the mind should not heal the disease of drinking or drug-taking, for in these, too, it is the brain that is the seat of the trouble, and its disease and desire is the real cause of the damage done to bodily tissue. But when—still logically, though in a scale that swiftly ascends—you tell me that some power not surgical can heal a compound fracture, then I must part company. At least, I do not believe that any man living upon this earth can make it happen that bones that are broken should join together (especially when the fracture is compound and they stick out of the skin) without assisting Nature by what you call "mere manipulation," but by what I call, "setting the bone."

It is here we join issue.

We have often discussed these points before, and the discussion has ever ended in laughter. But the discussion ends this time in the book which I have written.

You have read these pages, and you know that in some points you seem to me to be very like Alice Yardly, but those are the points on which we agree to differ. I think Alice Yardly and you are often too silly for words. But you are much more essentially like Bertie Cochrane, and it is to you, in the character of him, that I dedicate this book. You, sick with a mortal disease, found healing in Christian Science, and in it found happiness. And now you yourself heal by the power that healed you. For I hope I shall

never forget that which I with my own eyes saw you do—that which is the foundation of the last scene of the healing in "The House of Defence." To save that drug-logged wreck, who was our friend, when you saw no other way of convincing him of the beastliness of his habit, you drank that which by all that is known of the drug should have killed you, and you drank it with complete and absolute confidence that it could not possibly hurt you. It is true—at least, Sir James tells me so—that it is not quite easy to poison oneself with laudanum, because the amateur will usually take too much, and be sick, or too little, and thus not imbibe a fatal dose. But you drank a good deal—I can see now the brown stuff falling in your glass—and it appeared to have no effect whatever on you. I will go further: it had no effect whatever on you. But it had the effect you foresaw on your patient: it cured him.

Now, again and again I ask myself, how did it cure him? He was very fond of you; he saw you, in the desire to save him, apparently lay down your life for him. I believe that his brain, his will-power, received then so tremendous and bracing a shock that laudanum for that moment became to him a thing abhorrent and devilish, as no doubt it is. The sight of you swallowing the deadly thing gave a huge stimulus to his will. That seems to me not only possible, but natural. Only, if this is the case, it was again his own mind, on which your action acted, that healed him.

That, however, does not explain why the drug had no effect on you. There again we part company. I believe it to have been your absolute confidence that it could not hurt you that left you unharmed and unaffected. You said, with a faith that to me is transcendent, "This thing shall not hurt me, because it is necessary for me to drink it." And your

body obeyed the orders of your mind, and was not harmed. But you will have none of that explanation. You say it could not harm you, because there is neither healing nor hurt in material things . . . And here we are again!

Let me cease to argue with you. Let me only say that to me that evening was an epoch. I have seen and heard of cheerful and serene heroism before, but it never before came so close to me as then, when the storm bugled outside, and the fire spluttered, and you drank your deadly glass.

Affectionately yours,

E. F. BENSON.

THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE little travelling-clock that stood on the broad marble chimney-piece, looking strangely minute and insignificant on the slab supported by two huge Caryatides, had some minutes ago rapped out the hour of eight in its jingling voice, but here, in these high latitudes of Caithness, since the time of the year was close on midsummer, the sun still swung some way above the high hills to the northwest. It shone full, with the cool brightness of the light of Northern evenings, into the deep-seated window where Maud Raynham was sitting, waiting, without impatience, for im-

patience was alien to her serene habit of mind, but with a little touch of anxiety, for her brother's return. The anxiety, the wish that he would come, could not be absent, since affection and all its kindred cares were the hearth-side inhabitants of her heart. Also, it must be confessed, she was extremely hungry, and wanted dinner quite enormously.

The window in which she sat was one of six, for the room was of great extent, and looked, perhaps, even larger than it really was owing to its half-dismantled condition, while the shining parquetted floor, almost bare of carpets, was like a surface of dim looking-glass, multiplying the area. In one corner was a small table, laid for two, where they would belatedly dine when he came in; near it was a man's table, littered with correspondence and the apparatus of tobacco, while close by the fireplace was a low easy-chair, with a basket disgorging needlework beside it, which indicated where she herself had been

making her nest until she had strolled across to the window, when the clock struck eight, to enjoy the last half-hour of sunlight, and also to catch sight of her brother when his figure should appear coming up the straight riband of the road towards the house, from the village below, where he had been all day. Though the month was mid-June, a gay sparkle of fire, born of the delectable mixture of peat and coal, burned on the hearth between the two marble Caryatides, making an agreeable brightness for the eye, and destined after sunset to make a warmth not less agreeable; for nights even now were not often without the chill that turned to frost before morning, and this evening, in spite of the clear shining of the low sun, there was in the air that crystalline brightness that portended cold when the direct rays were withdrawn. For the house stood high and exposed on these grey and purple-heathered hills of Caithness, without protection from neighbouring tops or screen of wind-swept trees, and the full

vigour of the temperatures both of noon and midnight was felt there without abatement.

This table laid for dinner in one corner, the man's littered desk, and the woman's nook near the fireplace, all planted together in one big room out of the many big rooms that this great grey house contained, gave the note as of gipsy and unpremeditated encampment, and this was borne out also by the holland sheetings that had not been removed from the two big glass chandeliers which hung from the ceiling, and which loosely enveloped certain large articles of furniture, and made a pall in front of a bookcase. All this pointed to a sudden and temporary occupation, as if those who had taken possession of the house were content with the mere necessities of life, and gave no thought to its adornments and decorations. Such was indeed the case, for Lord Thurso and his sister, Lady Maud Raynham, had arrived here a few days ago only, preceded by a telegram to the caretaker to make habitable a bedroom for

each of them, and a living-room for them together. They had come, in fact, suddenly and in mid-season, for in the village of Achnaleesh, over which Maud's eyes now looked, a mile below the house, there had broken out, virulent and appalling, an epidemic of typhoid fever; and since Achnaleesh, like everything else within those wide horizons, was part of Lord Thurso's immense Scotch property, it had been clear to him, without debate or question on the subject, that it was his business to leave town at once and come up here to see how far human efforts could avail to check this pestilence, and relieve the sufferings of those homes already stricken with it. His wife, however, though not her heart only, but her efforts and active support, were ever at the service of charitable schemes, had not in the least seen her way to accompanying him. If Thurso thought he had better go, by all means let him do so, but she failed to see what object there could be in her accompanying him which would compensate

for the inconvenience of leaving town just now. For herself, she could see nothing gained by the journey of either of them, since he was in hourly communication with his agent, a reliable and careful man, who would see that everything medically desirable was carried out. But she was not aware how either his presence or hers would be conducive to the effectiveness of sanitary measures; yet, since she knew that her husband looked on many questions with a different eye from hers, she had no more attempted to dissuade him from going than he had tried to persuade her to come up with him. But it had seemed quite obvious to Maud that Thurso must not go by himself, and without either publicly or privately criticising his wife's refusal to go, she h[illegible] simply place. Indeed, she h[illegible] felt tion to criticise; [illegible] kept Ca London were [illegible] ll be cancel had hardl[illegible] other her co[illegible] she ha[illegible] at an earl[illegible]

driven to King's Cross with him. Perhaps it seemed almost equally natural to him that she should come.

In any case, the state of things which they found on their arrival seemed to them both to have rendered his coming imperative. Even in the last twenty-four hours there had been a portentous increase of cases, and a panic terror, such as is only possible among folks ignorant for the most part of all illness except such as shadows old age, and naturally of rude health, had seized the village at this sudden smiting down of the strongest and healthiest among them. Mixed with this panic, too, was the fear and distrust of doctors, and the inability to believe that it could be right, when a man was prostrate with the exhaustion of long-continued fever, to deny him a morsel of meat or a crust of solid food. Doctors were there and nurses, as Thurso had ordered, but it was the obedience to their orders which, till he came,

had been so hard to enforce. For this alone he knew he had been right in coming himself, apart from the reason of sentiment which forbade him to be absent, since a word from him, his expressed wish, was more potent than all the orders that doctors might give. For feudal obedience to that long and kindly race of landlords was far more paramount than medical advice; and since the laird ranged himself on the side of the doctors, who ordered windows to be opened when all other folk of commonsense would be inclined to shut every chink and cranny by which air might enter and give cold to the patient, and forbade solid food even to those "puir bodies who had been crying out half the nicht for a bit of bread," it was necessary to follow these inscrutable decrees, though wise heads were shaken over such unreasonable treatment. Lady Maud, too, had had the fever, and with her own mouth testified that even she, when all delicacies were within the reach of her purse, had been content with nothing

but milk, and no bite of solid food. That, too, carried weight.

Thurso had brought his valet up with him, but Maud's maid had so clearly shown that she regarded the journey to the plague-stricken spot as equivalent to a sentence of death that she had left her behind in town, and the caretaker and his wife were the only other servants in the huge house that in autumn buzzed with attendance. Upstairs there was a bedroom for each of them, and below just this one half-shrouded room, in a corner of which they encamped, leaving the rest to holland sheeting. Otherwise the great house was at siesta, and to Maud, who only knew it hitherto when it was a kaleidoscope of guests, there was something attractive in its repose. She had come straight from the whirl of mid-season in London, at the time of the year when every day consists of forty-eight hours, and each hour of that day of a hundred and twenty minutes, all

immensely occupied; and the contrast between the hour now, while she sat in the late evening sun in the window-seat waiting for Thurso to return, and the corresponding hour which was going on in London, when she would have been hurrying out to dinner, with a busy day behind her, and the opera and a ball to make short work of the night, gave her food for a certain quiet contentment. The contrast was so pleasantly violent; it was like that moment when one steps suddenly, out of the blare and brilliance of a ball-room, where one has enjoyed the waltz quite immensely, onto some quiet, tented balcony, with the trees of the park in front, and above the serenity of starlight. On a slightly larger scale that contrast was hers now. She had stepped out from London into the tranquillity of these Caithness moors. To say that she had not regretted leaving town would be untrue; she had, at any rate, regretted the clear necessity of leaving it, and coming up here with her brother.

But it had been necessary for her to go; she could not possibly have done otherwise, and though she was sorry (if she allowed her mind to dwell on that) to have cut herself off from all the delightful things that were going on in town, from the ceaseless stream of friends whom one met all day and all night, and who were amusing themselves so diligently, even as she had been amusing herself, it was still quite clear that somebody must come up here with Thurso, and that, since Catherine did not propose to come, she was the obvious person to do so. But she no more wasted sighs over what she was missing in town than she wasted sighs when she lost a fish. That particular fish was off; she would angle for another fish instead. There were fish everywhere; there was no situation, as far as she knew, out of which nothing was to be captured. Here, indeed, she had her fish already hooked for her; she had come to keep house for Thurso, to make things cheerful for him as far as she could, to prevent

his being a prey to boredom and depression when he came home in the evening after a long day spent in the fever-stricken village. She had already found that there was room for her skill.

Nature had for many generations adopted a very reasonable plan with regard to the gifts she devoted to the Raynhams. As a family they were extremely prolific, so with regard to them she had certainly said to herself, "There is not enough beauty at my disposal to go round. What shall I do about them? Shall I divide all the beauty which I feel justified in investing in each generation, among all the children, or shall I endow one of them with it all, and leave the rest to look after themselves?"

She had adopted the latter and most sensible alternative, and now for six or seven generations of Raynhams one of the many children had always been endowed with extraordinary beauty,

while the others had to be content with a certain air of distinction and pleasantness which, after all, made their plainness of feature a matter of small account. Sometimes Nature had made an error of judgment, as anyone seeing the family portraits must feel, in investing the beauty of a generation in a boy instead of a girl; but in this instance she had made no such mistake, and here in the window, waiting for her brother, was the bank in which the physical fortunes of the family were, for this generation, invested. Like them all, Maud was tall, and charm in her had not been sacrificed to perfection of feature. For violet eyes, rare in themselves, are so often no more than violet eyes, just pieces of exquisite colour. But here the myriad moods of the girl's mind that chased each other like cloud and shadow on some windy day of spring across dark seas, lit wonderful lights in those violet pools, or made them dark as sapphires at night, and through these beautiful windows of her soul a beautiful

soul looked forth. Humour and an alert sense of the ludicrous, so valuable as weapons in that arsenal of the mind from the stores of which we have ever to be arming ourselves against the assaults of tiresome and aggressive circumstance, gleamed there, ready to set the mouth smiling; eager and kindly interest in the spectacle of life was there, like a friendly face in the theatre; and deep down in those eyes you would say that something not yet awake or aware of itself slept and perhaps dreamed in its slumber of twenty years. And a man might find his breath catch in his throat at the thought of awakening it.

Being a Raynham, she was very fair of complexion, but her hair was not of that vague straw colour which loosely passes for gold, provided only that the skin is white and pink, but of that tint which has been touched and proved by assay to be of the veritable metal. It grew low on her forehead and abundantly, but not in those excessive quantities that instantly call to the mind

of the observer those ladies who stand all day with their backs to the windows of populous thoroughfares in order to display the riotous excess of capillary covering which the use of some advertised unguent results in. Nor did her mouth ever so faintly resemble the "Cupid's bow" which is so dear to the fashion-plates of feminine loveliness. It was not like a bow at all; it was rather large, rather full-lipped, but, like her eyes, or like aspen-leaves in spring, it was ever a-quiver to the breeze of the moment, instinctively obeying the kindly mind that prompted it. Nor were her lips vermilion — a hue that Nature happily does not employ in the colouring of the human mouth, leaving its employment to art — but they were of that veiled blood-tint, blood below something like oiled silk, that speaks of youth and vitality as surely as vermilion speaks of the desire to be vital and young.

The window faced north-west, and the rays of the sun, near its setting, poured full onto her, so

that she half closed her eyes as she looked out across the golden haze of its level beams, while the breeze from the open sash just stirred her hair. The lawn, so pleasant to walk on, that carpet of grass woven with moss, and so impossible to use for the desecrating games which in England demand that a lawn be hard and flat, lay below the windows, enclosed in a riband of flower-bed, brilliant with the strong colours that distinguish the North and the South from the more temperate zone. Beyond ran a wall of grey stone, some four feet high, where tropæolum was rampant, but outside the untamed moor broke against it, as against a sea-wall, so that, going out from the garden-gate, set in the middle of it, one foot might still be on the soft tameness of the lawn, while the other was on the primeval heather. Just these few acres of garden and land for the house had been captured and tamed out of the moorland, while outside and all round, ragged and prehistoric as the ocean, there flowed, like the sea round some sand castle

erected by children playing on the shore, the hills and heather of Caithness, tossing and tumbling there, as they had tumbled and tossed before ever the foot of man had set his tread on this waste land. Stone Age and what-not had gone to their making, and in so short time again—reckoning as the stones and the vegetable life of these transitory things number the years—these little puny efforts of man, the lawns and the terraces, would be swallowed up again, and smothered in the effervescence and fever of the world. Even now, how the infinitesimal microbe of disease was prevailing against the fragile life of the poor bewildered peasants in the village set down there in a wrinkle of the hill, invisible itself, but over which hung the blue smoke of the fires kindled at sunset!

These thoughts were of sombre texture, and Maud, through whose head they were passing unbidden, like scenes involuntarily presented, never consciously allowed herself indulgence in sombre thought, unless from the shadows she expected

the birth of something bright. Yet even after she had acknowledged the sombreness and inutility of it, she let her mind dwell on it all a little longer, searching, though vaguely, for some bracing counterblast. Of course, God was over all: she knew that quite well, and actively believed it. But when a plague like this, caused, no doubt, by the carelessness and uncleanliness of man, was snapping off lives like dried stalks, she would have liked to be able to think of some image that reconciled the beneficence of God with these hideous phenomena. It was impossible to see what ultimate good could come of letting people die like this. If from it all came some sign, some signal evidence of Divine power, it would be intelligible, or at least salutary. As it was, they died; the place was stricken.

Then the instinct of youth, of health, of exuberant vitality, came to her aid, and she dismissed these questionings altogether. For her instinct told her, though the thought did not quite

reach the coherence of definite words, how paralysing to oneself, and how infectious as regards others, is the indulgence of all dispiriting and depressing thought. Its microbes were as truly existent in the emotional and spiritual world as were the fever bacilli in Achnaleesh. But equally existent and even more potent and infectious were the sun-loving germs of confidence and the cheerful outlook. Already had she proved the truth of that in connection with Thurso, who had come home about this hour last night in a state of the blackest gloom and despair over the plight of this village of fever-stricken homes, but whose deadly depression had been quickly dispersed by her steady optimism. Thurso was naturally of extremely impressionable and imaginative mind, and the day, spent, as it had been, in going from house to house, finding everywhere the apparatus of illness, or the simpler and grimmer apparatus of death, had been like some hideous and real nightmare to him. Then, too, he tortured himself

with a hundred unfounded suppositions. The epidemic seemed to him, though how he knew not, to be primarily his fault. Clearly, if everything—drains, water-supply, sanitary arrangements—had all been in perfect order, typhoid could not have come. The people were his tenants; it was his business to make sure that the conditions under which they lived were absolutely healthy.

Now Thurso, as a matter of fact, was the most conscientious and careful of landlords, and these suppositions, though they had seemed hideously real to him yesterday evening, were but morbid creations of his brain, and on them Maud, with her cheerfulness and serenity of spirit, had acted like a charm. She knew well that he had in no detail been neglectful or culpable, and that being certain, she had set herself, not directly to combat his doubts and questionings, but to turn his attention resolutely away from them, just as a wise nurse will direct a patient's attention to some

interest alien to his pain, and not, by attempting to prove that pain is only an impression conceived by the brain, let his mind dwell on it. She had said to herself, "Darling old Thurso is terribly depressed. So I must distract his mind by being foolish."

So foolish she had been, but yet with art, so that it did not occur to him that she was playing the part of a nurse. And as when David played before Saul to exorcise the evil spirit, so she had played till for the time he forgot his troubles, both real and imaginary, in the charm and gaiety which, though she made deliberate use of them, were yet natural to her.

To-night, however, the obsession of his fears and despondency seemed to have descended on and infected her, and it needed a long and conscious effort to rid herself of them. For—this might be unreasonable too—she knew at the back of her mind she was very anxious about him.

Terrible as the epidemic was, it was producing a disproportionate effect on him; he was taking it too hard and far too self-consciously. From her intimate knowledge of him, and from that instinct which common blood possesses, which can enable a sister to know precisely what a brother is feeling, though to a wife even the knowledge would be vague, she felt that he was strung up almost to breaking-point. But she knew also, with a glow of secret pride in his courage, that nobody but she would have guessed that, unless, perhaps, some skilled observer of nervous symptoms. That from childhood had been the danger of his constitution: he was balanced on so fine an edge, ready to topple over into the gulfs of black despondency; but, with the courage of high breeding, he ever concealed his private hell from the world, turning a brave and tranquil aspect to it, even though he must wear a mask. But for her he wore none, and she often saw his inward torture, when others knew only of a pleasant,

courteous man—not gay, but of a manner that denoted quiet enjoyment of the world and habitual serenity.

Maud got up from her seat in the window and closed the sash—for the air grew instantaneously chilly, and the sun had dropped behind the hills to the north-west, leaving her in shadow—still looking down the grey riband of road that led to the lodge and crossed the moor to the village beyond. Her mind was decidedly not at ease about her brother. How inextricably soul and body were mixed and mingled! how instantaneously they acted and reacted on each other! For Thurso's anxiety about his people, a purely mental or spiritual condition, had kept him awake last night, and he had come down this morning with one of those excruciating neuralgic headaches to which he had been liable all his life. His suffering mind had called in his body to suffer with it, and the bodily pain had reacted back on his mind, making the poor fellow—not to put too fine

a point upon it—most abominably cross to Maud at breakfast. Then, since there was the day's work in front of him, for the sake of which he had come up here—and in his racking pain he was really incapable of doing it—he had taken the remedy which he had always by him, but which, in theory, he disliked having recourse to, as much as Maud disliked his taking it. But when after breakfast he had said to her, "Maud, I simply can't go down there, and if I did, I couldn't help in any way, unless I get rid of this agony," she had agreed that it was an occasion for laudanum.

She strolled across to the fire, and held out her hands to the blaze, which shone through her fingers, making them look as if they were redly luminous in themselves and lit from within. Then suddenly, with a little dramatic gesture, as if she carried her trouble, a palpable burden, in her hands, she threw it into the fire, and, having consigned it to destruction, walked back to the win-

dow again. Yet she knew in herself that it was not thus easily got rid of, for it went very deep. There must be some explanation of all this undeserved suffering, but what was it? How could it be just that a child should be cursed with inherited disease? How could it be just that Thurso's very kindness and concern for his tenants should give him hours of blinding torture? . . . But there at last was a figure on the road, and, without putting on her hat, she went out to meet him.

She saw at once, before she could clearly see his face, by a limpness and dejection in his walk, that he was horribly tired and in pain. But that, since now there was something for her to do, enabled her to get rid of her own dejection, since her cheerfulness, her serenity, must be brought into action. So, before they actually met, she called to him.

"Oh, Thurso, how late!" she said. "Have

you any idea that it is after half-past eight, and I've got such a sinking inside as is probably quite unparalleled? Don't let us dress; then we can dine at once. I'm sure dinner is ready, because I distinctly smelled soup, and something roast, and baked apples, all rolling richly out of the kitchen windows. I nearly burst into tears because I wanted them so much. Well, how has the day gone?"

He looked at her in a sort of despair.

"Oh, Maud, it is too awful," he said. "Twelve fresh cases to-day; I don't know what to do. And when my head is like this I'm worse than useless. I can't think; I can't face things."

Maud took his arm.

"Poor dear old boy!" she said. "Has it been bad all day?"

"No; it was all right in the morning after the laudanum, but it came on worse than ever after lunch. Well, not exactly after lunch, because I didn't have any."

Maud gave a little exclamation of impatience.

"Thurso, you are too bad!" she said. "You know perfectly well that if you go without food too long, you always get one of these headaches. And it isn't the slightest use your saying that there wasn't any time for lunch, because the biggest lunch that ever happened can be eaten in ten minutes, whereas a headache takes hours. I hate you to be in pain; but what a fool you are, dear! You are wicked also, knave and fool, because you make yourself of absolutely no use to anybody when you are like this."

He smiled at her; the infection of her energy put a little life into him.

"Well, I forgot about lunch till the pain came on," he said; "and it was turned full on at once. After that I simply couldn't eat; it was no use trying."

"If that is meant to imply that you are not going to have any dinner either," she said, "you make a grave error. You are going to have

soup and meat and roast apples. And if you attempt to deny it, I shall instantly add toasted cheese. In fact, I think I will in any case."

Thurso was silent a moment.

"Ah, these poor wretched people——" he began.

But Maud rudely and decisively interrupted.

"I am not going to hear one word about them till you have finished dinner," she said. "Afterwards, because you will be better then, we will talk. Don't you remember how, if we weren't quite well, nurse always said that we would be better after dinner? And we always were, unless we ate too much. I wonder whether it was dinner that did it, or mere suggestion—don't they call it—from the omnipotent and infallible nurse."

"Dinner," said he. "Oh, damn my head!" he added in a sudden burst of tired irritability and pain, which was rare with him, even to Maud.

"Yes, with pleasure, if that will make it better. But I wonder if it was entirely dinner. You know, there is something in suggestion, though I prefer supplementing suggestion with some practical measure. Who are those people who are always quite well because they think they are?"

"I should think they are fools," said he.

"Yes, but that is not their official title."

"I can't think of a better one," said he. "By the way——"

"Well?"

"No, nothing," he said.

Maud withdrew her arm from his with dignity.

"That is extremely ill-bred," she said. "Mind, I don't in the least want to know what you were going to say—in fact, I would much sooner you did not tell me—but having begun, you would, if you had decent manners, go on."

Thurso laughed; sharp though his neuralgia

still was, he was already beginning to think of things apart from himself.

"How can you say that?" he asked. "You are bursting to know."

"Well, yes, I am. Do tell me."

"I sha'n't. Maud, I think I will change, though it is so late, as I have been in and out of those houses all day. But you needn't; you can begin without me, if you like."

Maud put her nose in the air.

"Did you *really* imagine I was going to wait for you?" she asked.

Thurso went upstairs, still smiling at Maud's unbridled curiosity, especially since there was no mystery or reason for secrecy about that which he had stopped himself telling her. He merely was not quite sure whether or no he wanted to do that which he had been on the point of proposing, and which in itself was of a perfectly unexciting nature. The bare, dull facts of the

matter were these. He had let the salmon-fishing of the river here until the end of July to an American, whose name at the moment he could not remember, and this afternoon, as he came out of one of the cottages, he had passed one of his gillies carrying rod and gaff, and walking with a young man of clearly transatlantic origin, whom he felt sure must be the American in question; and the remark he had refrained from making to Maud was that it might be neighbourly to ask him to dinner. But as he made his hurried toilet, he found himself debating the reasons for and against doing this with a perfectly unaccountable earnestness, as if the decision this way or that was one that could conceivably be of importance. On the one side, the reasons against asking him were that the hospitality they could offer him was of the plainest and most baked-apple kind, served in a shrouded room, and that he would probably get a much better dinner at the inn where he was quartered. Also, he himself felt that if he

had come up to Caithness to fish, he would much sooner that his landlord did not ask him to dinner, since his hospitality, if accepted, would mean the curtailment of the cream of the evening rise. So perhaps the truer hospitality would be shown in not burdening his tenant with the necessity of inventing an excuse or of accepting a tiresome invitation. Then suddenly the man's name, Bertie Cochrane, flashed into his mind. Thurso had thought it so odd to sign a lease by an abbreviated name. In any case, it would be kinder not to ask Mr. Bertie Cochrane to come three miles in order to eat Scotch broth with a tired landlord, who would probably be suffering from severe neuralgia.

But, on the other hand, Thurso felt a perfectly unaccountable desire to see him. He had just met and passed him in the village street, after coming out from one of those fever-stricken cottages where a young stalker of his was lying desperately ill. At the moment he, too, was

screwed down to the rack with this hideous unnerving pain, and feeling utterly dispirited and beaten and hopeless. But for half a second his eyes had met Cochrane's, and just for that half-second—by chance, perhaps, or perhaps by reason of that subtle animal magnetism which some people possess—Thurso had suddenly felt both soothed and encouraged. Maud, he knew, had something of this magnetic quality, and to be with her always braced him to a livelier optimism; but in this case the effect had been magical. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the man: he was rather tall, young, clean-shaven, with a pleasant boyish face that suggested plenty of cold water and open air. That was all, but at the moment Thurso had felt almost inevitably inclined to speak to him and thank him; to tell him how bitterly his head ached and how miserably dispirited he felt; to tell him also that he had made him feel better. The impulse had been quite absurdly strong, but in another mo-

ment they had passed, going their respective ways. But all the afternoon, subsequent to that chance encounter, the remembrance of Mr. Cochrane strolling down to the river, and talking in so pleasant and friendly a manner to the gillie, had never been wholly out of his mind. Cochrane had seemed an incarnation of health and contentment, and the other all day had found it scarcely possible to believe in the existence of such qualities, so remote were they from him. Then antagonism to Mr. Cochrane had begun to take root in him: he seemed a millionaire in happiness, leaving pauperism all round him. Well, it was unlikely they would meet again; reasons of hospitality were sufficient for not asking him to accept it.

He finished dressing without any severe return of pain, but just as he was ready to go downstairs it came suddenly back again in such stabs and spasms of anguish that for a moment he held on to his dressing-table with clenched

hands, bitten lips, and a dripping forehead. Then his eye fell on the bottle of laudanum which stood by his looking-glass, and though never before had he taken two doses on the same day, yet never before after one dose had he suffered pain so agonising and excruciating as this. But to-day the impulse was incontrollable: he could no longer reason about the expediency of it, and next moment, with shaking hand, he poured a full dose into the graduated glass, and drank it. Those few moments had made him feel faint and sick with pain, and after drinking he sat down to wait for the divine relief that would come so quickly. On his very sensitive and excitable nerves the drug exercised an almost instantaneous effect—not soporific at all, but tranquillising and at the same time immensely stimulating. The pain would fade like the melting away of the vapour of breath on a frosty morning, till it became an incredible memory, while even as it faded a warm tingling glow began to invade him.

It was as if after some frost-bitten Arctic night the sun of the South would pour its beams upon his brain; happiness and content would unfold, and, like some magic rose miraculously opening its rosy petals in the luminous peace of a summer morning, a sense of unspeakable well-being would sprawl and blossom over his consciousness.

He had not to wait long: before the seconds on the watch which he had just taken up when the agony seized him had ticked themselves into a minute, the divine remission of pain began, and, increasing as it increased, there came that extraordinary glow of content, so that a couple of minutes afterwards it was not so much in the utter relief of pain that his body revelled as in the ecstasy of this supreme, harmonious sense of health. And then, as always, this spread like some tide of warm incoming waters to his mind. The horror and suffering he had seen that day in the fevered village ceased to weigh upon him and darken him with the sense of his possible respon-

sibility and certain helplessness. Instinctively, his mind ceased to dwell on the thought of the stalker whose life was nearly despaired of, but went to another bedside where a life that had been almost despaired of yesterday had seemed to pause at the very entrance of the valley of the shadow, and had crawled back a little way into life again. The shadow from the valley still lay over it, but its face was set towards the living. Already this divine drug had done that for him: it stopped pain of the mind, it seemed, even as it stopped the torture of an anguished nerve.

He had sat down for a moment to recover from the physical faintness which had seized him at that savage assault of pain, but he had sat down also in order to abandon himself with greater receptiveness to the rapture of the effect that he knew would come with that remission. Then, after a few minutes more, he got up, remembering two things—the first that Maud was probably waiting for him, though she had scorned

the notion; the second that this evening for the first time he was consciously revelling and delighting in the bodily and mental sensations that the opium produced, apart from its anodynic qualities. Hitherto he had taken it purely medicinally, sparingly also, in order to relieve pain, when the pain was frankly intolerable, or when it paralysed his power of making exertions that he was clearly called upon to make; and, having taken it like a medicine, he had in intention done no more than profit by the medicinal advantage of its restorative qualities. But to-night he knew, if he honestly looked at the spring of motive, that he had done something different—had drunk with a different desire. True, the pain had been in itself almost demoralising in its intensity, but when he drank he had waited for and desired, not only the remission of that, but the glow of exquisite well-being and that harmony of sensation which the drug gave him. That was even more heavenly than the cessation of the acutest pain.

But after a minute or so he got up, thereby interrupting the blissfulness of sensation, for Maud would wonder why he tarried. And as he went downstairs a third thought, suggested by that secret friend in the brown bottle, occurred to him. He must not let his sister know that he had taken a second dose to-day, and, arising from that, he must conceal from her how suddenly and completely the pain had gone, lest she should guess or suspect. Already he felt half ashamed of the mixed motive which had led to his taking it, yet . . . yet the supreme sense of physical well-being that was his just now prevented him from feeling acutely anything but that. And if Maud suspected up to the point of asking him if he had dosed himself again? Well, in that case it would be wise to follow the example of Sir Walter Scott. She had no business to ask such a question; his answer, whatever it might be, was her responsibility, not his. Perhaps it would be better to minimise the possibility of her

asking; he had better appear silent and suffering till dinner was nearly over, and then confess that dinner had done him good. She had told him that it would; she would be delighted to see the efficacy of her prescription. And that the pain left him suddenly would be no surprise to her. Often it left him as suddenly as it came on—as if it was the turning of a tap.

All this flashed instantaneously into his mind, just as a man takes in a landscape at a glance, though it may take him many words to describe what a moment's vision has conveyed to him. Another thought flashed there too. There was authentic Paradise in that little bottle; whether one had been in pain or not, there was the Garden of Eden. He felt that he would willingly endure tortures if at the end he could push open those golden gates again, and walk past the flaming sword of its guardian. Pain weighed light compared to those pleasures, and surely half an hour of Paradise now and then could not hurt

him, a drop of water on the lips of Dives. He felt perfectly willing, weighing the two in the balance of his mind, to pass through hells of torture for that compensation. Then faintly and far away came the suggestion that even without the hours in hell there was Paradise still open.

Maud had been very hungry, and had already finished soup when he came downstairs, and, according to his plan, he said little or nothing till he had caught her up on the "something roast." Indeed, his first question had been the demand for a second supply of that, and Maud gave him an approving nod. He had eaten no lunch, and now, as soon as he began to eat, he was conscious of being extremely hungry, and the second supply vanished with the same briskness as the first. Then he leaned back in his chair as plates were changed.

"I don't like telling you that you are right," he said, "because it will only confirm your be-

lief in your own wisdom. But I am nothing if not honest. Dinner or suggestion or both have certainly done the trick. The Lady Neuralgia has turned off the tap—turned it off with the same firm hand as she turned it on. It doesn't even drip. I will allow, even, that it was your suggestion that made her do it. Who cares how it happened? I will allow anything. Yes, two roast apples, please, and I think we will have toasted cheese. I had no lunch, you must remember."

"Oh, Thurso, I am so glad," she said. "And I so often wish I could take some of it—no, not toasted cheese, you silly—for you."

"I don't think you would wish it so much when you had got it," he remarked.

"Oh, I don't say I should like it. But I know I could bear lots of pain if I knew that otherwise it would be somebody else's. The difficulty would be if it was only your own. And, I tell you frankly, you bear it most awfully well.

You are cross with me because you know I don't mind——"

"At breakfast, do you mean?" he asked. "I know I was. I am sorry, but I was mad with it. You don't think I show it to other people, do you?"

"No, dear, only to me, or I shouldn't have mentioned it."

He looked at her a moment in silence, then he laughed, but grew grave again before he spoke.

"No; you understand," he said, and then the poisonous fumes of the drug stirred and recommended caution in his brain. "I think you would always understand," he said. "I think I would always tell you everything."

"About to-day, then," said she. "You may tell me about it now. Oh, how wise I was not letting you talk before dinner! I'm sure you were taking a neuralgic view."

"I was. I was thinking only of poor Sandie, who, they are afraid, is dying, instead of thinking

about Donald Fraser's wife, who seems to be a little better, though yesterday they thought she could not live. It was the Lady Neuralgia who made me remember the one and forget the other. There was something else, too, I wanted to talk about with you. It's this, Maud. I made the plan only this morning: I couldn't have told you before."

He paused a moment. That last sentence, again, was, though absolutely true, an effort of self-justification. He had acquiesced in deceiving Maud on one point, should that point come forward; he felt as if he had to tell not only her, but himself, that he was showing the whole truth about this.

"I know you will feel with me," he said, "though no doubt Catherine will make a fuss when she knows, if she ever does, and will probably paint everything with carbolic. But I must turn this house into a hospital for all those poor folk—for all, at least, who can be moved here.

Think of it! A case appears in one of those tiny houses, and what happens? There are three, or perhaps four, rooms in them, and the whole of the family has to live in two rooms, or at the most three. The sick-room, too, where it is most important that there should be plenty of air—it is ten feet by twelve, and one small window! Dr. Symes agrees with me. He thinks, at any rate, that any case would have a much better chance up here. The moving is easy. They have one ambulance bed, and I have ordered more to-day from Inverness."

He lit a cigarette, and saw Maud looking at him with shining eyes. This was the Thurso whom she knew and loved. Then he went on:

"There's the big dining-room here," he said: "it will hold a dozen beds. There is the hall: it will hold eighteen, I should think. There are all the bedrooms; there is the billiard-room. Also, up here every nurse can look after twice the number of patients that she can attend to in scat-

tered cottages, and look after them all much better. So I have given orders. Dr. Symes will move up here to-morrow all those whom he thinks can be moved without undue risk. All fresh cases will come up here at once. Of course, you will go back to town. I—I appreciate tremendously your coming here at all, but now it will be impossible for you to stop in the house."

Maud laughed.

"And you, dear?" she asked.

"Me? Oh, I shall stop here, of course. I can't leave."

Maud left her place, and dragged a chair up beside him.

"Thurso, you are admirable," she said. "It's an excellent idea moving them up here, so excellent that I wonder I did not think of it first. But as for my going back to town——"

"But how on earth can you stop here with the house crammed full of typhoid patients?"

"Same way as you can. I leave here when you leave."

"But, Maud——"

"There isn't any 'but, Maud.' I don't go unless you turn me out into the cold bleak night —oh, let's poke up the fire, I am sure there is a frost!—in which case I shall die of exposure on the lawn. To begin with, there is no risk of infection, and, to go on with, I shouldn't catch it if there was."

"Oh! Why not?"

"Because one is mercifully allowed to get through the day's work. I came up here as your 'pal.' And if I went to bed with typhoid I couldn't be anybody's 'pal.' Besides, I've had typhoid already. At the present moment I am going to play you at picquet, and you owe me nine shillings from last night."

CHAPTER II.

MAUD had happened to come across in a book she was reading on the way up to Scotland an account of an epidemic of typhoid, in which the charitable lady (vicar's wife) of the place sat by the bedsides of the patients, held their hands, and fed them with "cooling fruits." It occurred to her as possible, though not very likely, that the treatment of typhoid had undergone alterations even as radical as this indicated, since she had had the disease herself, and on arrival she had asked the doctor, quoting this remarkable passage, if she should telegraph for a supply of cooling fruits. The excellent Dr. Symes, though not given either to joking or quick in the perception of a joke, had laughed immoderately.

"Cooling fruits!" he said. "Feed them with cooling fruits, Lady Maud, and you will soon stop the epidemic, because everybody will be dead." Then he checked his laughter. "It was good of you to come," he said, "but you have your work up at the house. Just keep Lord Thurso—because I know him—from moping and being miserable. I am glad you came with him. But when he is away, down in the village, do what you please apart from the cooling fruits. I suggest your being out of doors all you can. You will have your work in the evening, and the sun and the wind and the rain, which pray God we get, will fit you best for it."

This advice came into her head the next morning after she had seen Thurso off to the village, and it was counsel which jumped with her inclinations, since, according to her view, the world (especially the world of out-of-doors) was a swarm of delightful and congenial occupations, and of

them all none was so entrancing as catching sea-trout on a light rod and with light tackle. And since the river, which should be full of these inimitable fish, ran within some half-mile of the house, there was no great difficulty in the way of putting the doctor's recommendation into practice. She knew, of course, nothing of the fact that Thurso had let the fishing to the American whom he had met yesterday in the street, and had decided not to ask to dinner.

Thurso was not to come home to lunch that day, and as the house would be full of workmen busy shifting furniture, and making the rooms ready, under the superintendence of one of the doctors, for the reception of the typhoid patients, Maud went off to the river, without a word to anyone, except an order for a sandwich lunch, with a heart that was high and exultant in spite of the surrounding calamitous conditions. This turning of the house into a hospital was entirely characteristic of Thurso; she rejoiced to

think that their comfort, not money alone, was being sacrificed to sufferers. It was a cheap charity to give money, to spend merely unless expense pinched one, but it was a far more real effort of sympathy to turn the house into a fever-ward. It was that which brought people into touch, the knowledge that somebody's relief implied somebody else's trouble. Thurso was rich, the cost of what he did was of no account, but this was a more active sympathy.

Sandie, poor fellow, her special fishing gillie, was down with typhoid, and his case, as she knew, was very serious; so she set off alone, with a sandwich in her creel, and a light rod and a landing-net, feeling rather heartless, for she so much expected an enchanting day. She had to a huge degree that sensible gift which enabled her, when she had done her best in one direction, to enjoy the pleasure that lay before her in another; and being satisfied that she could not be of the slightest use during these next hours, either at home or in

the village with the "cooling fruits," she let herself go with regard to the excitement of the riverside. Her natural *joie de vivre* gilded all employments for her, but this angling for sea-trout had no need of gilding, since it was gold already. Nothing could be more entrancing—for hours one might cast an unclaimed fly upon the waters, yet never lose the confident anticipation that at any moment the swirl of submerged strength and activity would bend the rod to that glorious curve that the fisherman knows to be the true attack of what he has never seen. Like everything else that anybody really feels it to be worth while doing (keeping accounts alone being excepted), mystery and romance illuminated the pursuit, and as she walked down to the river, all else—Thurso's trouble, the fever-stricken village and its tragedies —were all sponged off her mind. Her heart was no less tender and solicitous than it had been, but her attention was engaged. Instead, mixed with the excitement of her anticipations, the dread-

ful things that might be in store for her by the river were in her mind, for to fish with a big sea-trout fly might easily attract the notice of the sea-trout's mightier cousins, in which case good-bye, probably, to the light tackle. But as it was no sport to catch sea-trout on a salmon-rod, Maud took this chance with a light heart.

The day was one of those grey days (rare in the North, where a grey day implies for the most part an east wind, which sucks the colour out of land and sky), with soft breezes from the south-west, which made heather and hillside and golden gorse and river more brilliant and full of colour than even the direct sunbeams, and, preoccupied though Maud was with the prospects of her fishing, her mind kept paying little flying visits to the beauty of the morning. Five minutes after she had left the house she was absolutely alone, and no sight either of human form or human habitation broke the intense solitude of eye and ear

which to such as her makes so dear and intimate a companionship. For she loved the pleasant things of the earth—the honey-scented heather and the sunshine of the gorse, and the close, silent friendship of Nature, unvexed and undistracted by human presences. To her, as to St. Francis, the trees were her dear brothers, and the sky and river her dear sisters, and somehow also the very sea-trout, in the slaughter of which she hoped to spend a delightful day, were blood relations and beloved by her. She could not have explained that attitude at all: she would frankly have admitted that it implied an inconsistency. But there the fact was.

And here at last was the rushing, jubilant river, which a rainy May had filled from bank to bank. She struck it at the Bridge Pool, at the head of which the stream was spanned by a swaying, airy suspension bridge, from which the pool took its name. Deep water lay on the near side, and a considerable piece of shallow water

on the other; but just beyond the shallows, could she but cast over it, ran a little channel she knew well, since it was a favourite place for the sea-trout. So she crossed the swaying, dancing bridge, debating within herself the choice of a fly. The river was high, the sky grey, and sea-trout would probably prefer a rather large fly, but so, unfortunately, would salmon. However, she must chance that—the big fly was certainly the correct game.

Five minutes was enough for the soaking of a cast and the adjustment of her rod, and already, with an attack of "fisherman's heart," which makes that organ apparently shift from its normal position into the throat, she began casting from just below the bridge. But with the longest line of which she was capable she could not reach that channel of deep water, and if she did not do that she might as usefully go a-fishing in a pail, like Simple Simon. But . . . there was nobody within sight, and next minute she had kilted her

skirts till she could wade out over that barren shoal-water, and stand where, with the cool bright water flowing nearly up to her knees, yet leaving her skirt unwetted, she could reach the deeper water beyond. Well she knew what a wet skirt meant to one who proposed to walk and fish all day; the heavy clinging blanket made all activity, all lightness of going, out of the question, and as she waded out she hitched it an inch or two higher. Then for a moment she had to pause to laugh at the figure she must inevitably be presenting were there anyone to see her. There was a knitted jersey for her upper half, a tweed cap for her head, a much kilted skirt and stockings for the rest. Her beauty and the vigour and grace of her limbs she forgot to consider, just as a beholder, had there been one, might have paid but scanty attention to the cap and jersey and skirt. But from where she stood she could cast over the coveted channel.

Half a dozen times her fly went on its quiet,

unerring circuit, then suddenly a gulp and a fin broke the surface just below it, and with another gulp her heart jumped upwards from her throat into her very mouth. The owner of that fin had not touched her fly, but—oh, the rapture and danger of it!—he was no sea-trout, but a fresh-run salmon. At that the pure sporting instinct usurped all other feeling. Light though her rod was and light her tackle, since there was a salmon in the river that felt an interest in her Jock Scott, she must try to catch him. He might (probably would) break her: then she would be broken. She had no gaff; very well, she must do without. He was a heavy fish too; she had seen enough of him for that. What a desperate and heavenly adventure!

She waded ashore, being far too wise in the science to cast over him again at once, preferring to wait a minute or two before she tempted him again, and as she gained dry land she saw that

there was a man half-way across the bridge just above the pool. He carried a salmon-rod over his shoulder, and a fishing-bag slung by a strap. He could not, of course, be fishing here on Thurso's water, and she guessed he must be going over to Scarsdale, where she knew that some new tenants had taken the lodge. But she gave him only the slightest and most fleeting attention, being far more interested that moment in one particular fish than in any particular man, and took no further notice of him, except that she unkilted her skirt an inch or two, for it showed really too much of what was called "leg." Then, without giving a further glance at the figure on the bridge, who had paused there watching her, she walked back again through the shallows to a point some ten yards above that where she had raised the fish, in order to make sure of casting over him again. The unkilted skirt dragged a little in the water, but she would have waded neck-deep after that fish. Also—this popped in and

out of her mind—there was a man watching, and she had no objection to a gallery when she was fishing. She would show him how to—well, probably lose, a salmon on trout-tackle with a trout-rod.

Yard by yard she moved down to where the dear monster had risen before. There he was again, but this time no fin broke the surface, only a submerged boil came at her fly. But this was the true attack—the suddenly bent rod, the sudden message on the line. At the same moment, out of the corner of her eye, she saw that the man had moved from his place on the bridge, and was coming up behind her on the bank.

But that occupied her infinitesimally; all that she really knew was that she was the possessor of a light trout-rod, fitted with light tackle, at the far end of which at the present moment there happened to be a salmon. Her landing-net was somewhere on the bank, but, as far as that went, it would be just as useful to her if it had been at

Jericho instead. But immediately the fish bolted down-stream, and her reel sang shrilly. Then, like an express train, he came back, and with the calmness of despair she reeled in, thinking for the moment he meant to go up under the bridge, in which case there would be need to soak another cast and look out another fly. But he changed his mind, and once more, after two or three rushes, he was opposite to her just where she had hooked him originally, shaking his head, so it seemed, for the rod jerked and jumped, yet no line ran out. Maud had moved back across the shoal-water during these manœuvres so as to gain the shore again, for she knew she must get somewhere where she could run, when from close behind her came a level, pleasant voice.

"He is well hooked," he said; "I saw him take it. But he'll be off down-stream in a minute, and there are a hundred yards of rapid before the next pool. I should get to shore quick if I were you, and be ready to run."

Maud still thought of nothing but her fish, which had already begun to bore slowly away into the deep water on the far side of the river, and she knew well what that would lead to. And she replied to the voice as if it had been only her own thoughts, which were identical, with which she was communing.

"Yes, I know," she said; "he's making for the deep water now. There!"

She splashed her way through the margin of the shoal-water, nearly tripping up over a submerged stone, just as the fish felt the full current of the river, and was off, full-finned, down-stream. Her reel screamed out, and in a couple of seconds there was a dreadful length of line between her and the fly. But she gained the smooth turf of the bank, and was off like an arrow after him, when, just before matters were desperate, a bend in the rapids brought her nearer to him, and, still running, she reeled hurriedly in. Then—oh, blessed haven!—he reached the deep water at

the head of the pool below, and, swimming there in small circles, allowed her to recapture more of her line. Then, still without taking her eyes off the water (for she felt sure that the owner of the voice had run down behind her), she spoke to him again.

"The humour of the situation is that I have only the very lightest tackle," she said; "for I came out after sea-trout. But luckily my fish doesn't know that. And would you be so kind as to get my landing-net? I left it on the bank just below the bridge."

"I saw it and brought it," said the voice. "But I don't know what you want it for. He's a twenty-pounder."

The voice was a very pleasant and friendly one, and Maud probably noticed that instinctively, for she spoke to this man whom she had never seen as if he was of her own class, anyhow. And here she laughed suddenly.

"I wonder what is going to happen next,"

she said. "That's half the joy of fishing, isn't it? Oh, look!"

For the first time the fish jumped, showing himself from head to tail, and splashed soundingly back into the pool again.

"Far side of twenty pounds," remarked the voice. "I told my gillie, I'm glad to say, to be down here by eleven, and he will bring a gaff. He should be here every minute. But there'll be no gaffing going on just yet."

This turned out to be perfectly true, and a dozen times in the next quarter of an hour Maud knew that she was within an ace of losing her fish. He behaved like the lusty fresh-run monster that he was, making disconcerting rushes down to the very tail of the pool, and running out her line almost to its last yard before she had time to follow him down the steep stony bank. Then he would seek the very deepest holes, and lie there sulking or jiggering, and putting the most dangerous snapping strains on her light tackle.

Then with a rush he would come straight back towards her, so that, do what she would, there were long perilous moments, though she reeled in with a lightning hand when he was on a slack line. But at length he began to tire a little, and instead of hurling himself about the pool, allowed himself to drift every now and then with the stream. That, too, was dangerous, and she had to treat him with the utmost gentleness, since both his dead weight and the press of the water were against her. Then again a spark of his savage pride would flare up, and he would protest against this mysterious compelling force; but he was weakening.

"Ah, poor darling!" said Maud once, as his struggles grew less.

And the voice answered her.

"Yes, that's just how I often feel," it said.

A minute or two more passed.

"Isn't your gillie here yet?" she asked.

"Yes, he came ten minutes ago. Shall I gaff him for you, or shall he?"

"Who is he?" asked Maud.

"It's Duncan Fraser, my lady," said another voice.

"Oh, then, Duncan, please," she said. "Is that rude of me? I am so sorry. But, you see, I know Duncan: he has often gaffed fish for me. Get further down, Duncan, and lie down—get below him; don't let him see you."

But there were several agitating moments yet. Each time the fish drifted with the stream she towed him a little nearer to the bank; but though he was very weak now and his protests feeble, he was still capable of momentary violences. But at last he was a mere log, floating with fin out of the water and broad silvery side shining. With a swift, crafty movement, Duncan had him on the bank.

Maud laid down her rod and turned away.

"Kill him quick, Duncan," she said. "Is it

done?" Then, with fine inconsistence: "Oh, what a darling!" she cried. "Quite fresh from the sea, too!"

Then for the first time Maud turned to look at the owner of the voice, and found a tall, pleasant-looking young man smiling at her.

"I am really extremely obliged to you," she said. "I don't see how I could have landed him without your gaff. There is nowhere in the pool where you can tail a fish."

He laughed at this.

"Why, I think that is so," he said. "But I am much more your debtor. I've never seen a fish so beautifully handled. Look at your tackle, too! Well, I never!"

"Oh, I know the water," she said, "and that makes so much difference, though I couldn't explain how."

Then suddenly the conjunction of a total stranger—American, too, so she could hear—with

a rod on her brother's river, in company with one of her brother's gillies, struck her as odd.

"I am afraid my fish and I have detained you very long," she said. "You are fishing at Scarsdale, I suppose."

"No, I am fishing here," he said. "At least, I shall walk down a mile or two, and try the lower pools."

This was more solidly incomprehensible. Yet the man did not look in the least like a poacher or trespasser. And how did it come about that Duncan was with him? Maud grew just a shade dignified, though she was still quite cordial.

"I'm sure you will excuse me," she said; "but, you know, this is my brother's river, Lord Thurso's."

Again the stranger laughed with sincere and quiet merriment.

"Oh yes, I know," he said. "But, you see, he has been kind enough to let the fishing to me until the end of July."

Maud stood quite silent a moment. A situation so horrible was dawning on her that she was unable to speak. What had he said? That Thurso had let him the fishing? Then, what was she? A poacher, caught red-handed by the tenant himself.

"What?" she said. "Say it again."

The stranger took off his hat.

"May I introduce myself?" he said. "I am Mr. Bertie Cochrane. Excuse me; I really can't help laughing. Why, it's just killing!"

Maud, already flushed with excitement and exercise, grew perfectly crimson.

"Oh, what am I to do?" she said. "It is too awful! How can you laugh? I can never forgive myself."

She raised her eyes to his again, and saw there such genuine, kindly amusement that, in spite of her horror, she laughed too.

"Oh, don't make me laugh," she said. "It

is too dreadful. Poaching! I thought it was you who were going to poach, and it's been me!"

"Yes, it's serious," he said; "and it's for me to make conditions."

Maud had one moment's fleeting terror that he was going to make an ass of himself, as she phrased it: ask to kiss her hand or do something dreadful. But he did not look that kind of donkey.

"Oh, my conditions are not difficult," he said. "I only insist on your not cutting short your day's fishing."

"Don't," she said. "I couldn't fish any more. Thank you very much, but I really think I couldn't."

"I think you should make an effort. You must consider me as insisting. You won't get in my way, nor I in yours. I meant to go a couple of miles down—I did indeed."

The situation which five minutes ago was so appalling had quite lost its horror; it was no longer unfaceable. Had Maud been told that morning that in the inscrutable decrees of Fate she was going to be caught poaching before lunch, she would have wished the earth to open and swallow her sooner than that anything so unspeakable should happen to her, while even two minutes ago there was nothing in life so impossible as that she should continue her career of poaching. But her captor was so unaffectedly friendly, his amusement, also, at her horror and the cause of it so sincerely kind, that she was no longer horrified.

"Really, Mr. Cochrane, it is too good of you," she said. "But you must first put me at my ease about one thing. You do know—don't you?—how dreadfully sorry I am, and that I hadn't the very slightest idea that Thurso had let the fishing. Oh, by the way, I really *am* Lady Maud Raynham."

"Why, yes," he said, and paused. "Then it's all settled."

The whole situation had gone, vanished, before his perfect simplicity and kindliness, and she smiled back at him.

"Thank you very much," she said. "I shall love to have this day on the river."

"And Duncan?" he said. "Pray keep him if you wish; otherwise I shall send him home. His wife is ill of this—this typhoid."

"Oh no; please let him go home, then," said Maud.

Then Cochrane turned to the gillie.

"Get along home with you, Duncan," he said, "and be sure—tell yourself—that you will find the wife still improving. I think you'll find she's been getting better all morning. But if you give her any of that medicine you will be just helping her—helping her, mind—to get worse again. You understand? If you find when you get home she is worse, give it her by all means. But you won't

find that: you will find she is better. Yes, gaff, landing-net, lunch—I've got them all, thanks. So off with you, and let your heart go singing. God's looking after her this morning, as He always did. She's going to get quite well. Don't lose sight of that, and don't let her lose sight of it either."

He had apparently quite forgotten about Maud as he spoke, and had turned a side face to her as he talked to the gillie. And though, during this little speech, all the kindliness and merriment that had twinkled in his eyes and twitched in his mouth when "the situation" had been unfolded between Maud and himself was still there, yet there shone through it now some vital and intense seriousness. He had laid his hand on the rough homespun of Duncan's shoulder, and spoke with a quiet and convinced air of authority. Then he nodded dismissal to him, and turned to Maud again, while Duncan trudged off down the river-bank.

"I'm so sorry for you and Lord Thurso," he said, "and I think it's downright good of you to have come up here, right in the middle of the season, just because your folk were ill. It's real kind of you."

Then suddenly his eye fell on the silver-mailed fish that still lay on the bank.

"Hi, Duncan!" he called out after the retreating figure, "take her ladyship's fish up to the house."

Duncan came back, and with difficulty folded the big fish into his bag, and shouldered it. But he paused a moment before he went again, looking at Cochrane with doglike eyes that, though they trust, yet beseech.

"But the wife is better, sir?" he asked.

"Ever so much. You are beginning to know that as well as I do. Now, off with you, for you've got to look after the baby, as she thinks she can't. Make it happy. Give it a real good time, and let it pull that great beard of yours."

He watched Duncan tramp away again with his heavy, peasant-footed tread down the bank.

"Dear blind soul," he said, half to himself. "But it's getting near dawn with his night."

Maud was already "arrested" with regard to her companion—she paid, that is to say, a good deal more attention to him than she paid to nine-tenths of casual strangers with whom she was, as now, accidentally brought into somewhat intimate contact. He had the arresting quality, whatever that is, which compels attention. It may be called animal magnetism, or vitality of a superior kind, but it has nothing to do with love or hate, like or dislike, though it may coexist, and often does, with any of these. It had not, for instance, even occurred to her to wonder whether she liked or disliked him, or was utterly indifferent to him; she only knew that he had the arresting quality. In manner he was very quiet, rather boyish, quite

well-bred, and rather good-looking, and in none of these respects was he different from the casual crowd. But there was, and she knew it, something that distinguished him from all men and women that she had ever seen, and this pause of a second or two, as Duncan took up the fish, was sufficient for her to determine in what the distinction lay. And it was this: he was so happy. Happiness of a sort she had never yet seen surrounded him like an atmosphere of his own, which it was given to others to breathe. She herself had breathed it—it radiated from him. Hundreds of people were happy—thank God, that is a very common gift—but the happiness that she now encountered was on a different plane. It was happiness distilled, sublimated. He seemed normally to dwell on the heights to which others in fine moments can attain. He seemed happy in the way that some extraordinary good news makes others happy for a moment or two, or an hour or two. Yet this was no retrospective happiness, the happiness of vivid

memory: it was his normally; it gushed from him as from some unquenchable spring.

This impression was made, as all strong impressions are made, in a moment, and there was no pause between his parting speech to Duncan, the fish-laden, and her taking up again the casual thread of talk. Yet was the thread a casual one? For his last words to Duncan seemed to come from the very heart and soul of the man, from the spring of his happiness.

"Do tell me," she said, "why did you say to Duncan that his wife only thought she was ill?"

The convinced happiness of his brown eyes looked at her a moment before he answered.

"Doesn't it come somewhere in Shakespeare?" he said. "'There's nothing but thinking makes it so?' Or words to the same purpose?"

"Yes, but if we take that literally," said Maud, "we must conclude that if she could only think

she was well, poor soul, she would be. It is hard to think that when you happen to have typhoid."

The brown eyes grew graver, but their happiness, as well as their gravity, seemed to deepen.

"Certainly, it is hard," he said. "Indeed, it is impossible, unless you can think right. But when you can do that, all the rest follows."

Maud suddenly felt slightly antagonistic to him. She remembered the few words she had had with Thurso last night about people who say they are always well, because they think they are, and his conclusion that they must be fools. She had tacitly agreed with him then, and was a little vexed with Mr. Cochrane because, honestly, he did not seem to be a fool.

"Have you ever had toothache?" she asked briskly.

"Never. And if I had, I shouldn't. Sounds

nonsense, doesn't it? But it just expresses the truth."

Then the name she had been unable to remember last night came back to her.

"Ah, you are a Christian Scientist!" she said. "You think all pain and illness is unreal."

He laughed.

"I know it," he said. "Now, I am sure you want to get on with your fishing. So there's your rod, and please keep this gaff. You are far more likely to hook another salmon in these upper pools than I am down below."

He had changed the subject with such undisguised abruptness that she could not help remarking on it. Yet, sudden as it had been, there was no hint of ill-breeding or rudeness about it. He merely spoke quite courteously of something else.

"Do you always change the subject as quickly as that?" she asked, smiling.

"Always, if I think I may be led into a dis-

cussion about Christian Science with strangers, who—— Pray don't think me rude, Lady Maud, but one can't talk about the subject which means more to one than the whole world with people who ask questions about it out of a sort of—well, derisive curiosity. Also, I don't proselytise. I think there are better ways of making the truth known."

The words were extremely direct, but again no hint of rudeness or want of courtesy was ever so faintly suggested, and though Maud still felt antagonistic, she knew that the most sensitive person in the world could not have found offence in them, so perfectly friendly and good-natured was his tone. He made this very plain statement without the least touch of resentment himself or fear of arousing it. And she, generous and fair-minded herself, gave in at once.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "You are quite right. There was a touch, though really not more, of what you so justly call derisive curiosity

in my mind. I had no business either to feel or show it. But may I ask you a question with that touch left out—honestly left out?"

"Why, of course—a hundred," said he.

"Then, why don't you proselytise?" she asked. "As you are convinced of the truth of your doctrine, isn't it your duty to spread it?"

Cochrane let his eyes wander from her face over the hillside, fragrant with heather and murmurous with bees. Then they looked at her again, and for the first time she saw that they were different from any eyes she had ever seen in the face of man or woman, for they were unmistakably a child's eyes, full of a child's disarming frankness, and almost terrible honesty.

"You can spread a thing in many ways," he said. "But preaching was not the primary way He chose. 'He went about doing good.'"

Maud felt herself suddenly seized with that shyness which is instinctive to most Anglo-Saxons

when "religion" puts in its appearance in conversation, and she was suddenly tongue-tied. With many people, no doubt, reticence on religious subjects is due to the fact that, since they have no religion, there is nothing for them to talk about. But it was not so with her. Religion formed a very vital and essential part of her life, but it was not a thing to be publicly trotted out like this. So, since the subject had so unexpectedly and profoundly deepened with this last remark, it was she who rather precipitately changed it now.

"I see," she said. "But please don't leave me the gaff. I should immensely like, since you are so kind, to try for another sea-trout or two, but having poached one salmon without your leave, I couldn't contemplate poaching another, even with it. So if I hook another he shall break me, and so I shall present your river with a fly and a cast by way of *amende.*"

Maud felt vexed and annoyed with herself.

She was not managing well; she thought she must be giving a quite false impression by chattering this stupid nonsense in order to get away from the subject of religion. But then a rather more natural topic suggested itself—namely, the idea of offering him hospitality, which had occurred to and been rejected by Thurso.

"And do come and dine with us to-morrow," she said, "and eat some of your own fish. Thurso and I would be delighted. We are just squatting in the house, you know, and eat and live in one room, and the caretaker's wife cooks. Ah, how stupid of me! I forgot. Thurso is turning the rest of the house into a typhoid hospital, and by evening the place will be full of patients. So please say 'No' point-blank if you don't like the thought. I shall quite understand."

Those childlike eyes looked at her in frank, unveiled admiration.

"Why, that's just splendid of you both," he said; "and as for coming to dinner, I shall be

delighted. We Scientists are often told we are inconsistent, but we are not quite so bad as to mind coming to a house where a few poor souls think they are ill. So, *au revoir,* Lady Maud, and many thanks."

Maud was a girl of great singleness of purpose, and generally, when she was out for a day's fishing, the number of moments in which she thought about things unconnected in any way with fishing scarcely made any total at all, while any other subject that was present in her mind was there only in a very dim and distant fashion. But to-day, during the hour's fishing which she indulged in between Mr. Cochrane's departure and lunch, her thoughts persistently strayed from fishing, and when eventually she made herself a windless seat in the heather, overlooking the pool which she had just fished, even the brace of silvery sea-trout she had already caught, and the

prospective brace or two that she promised herself before evening, occupied but a very small part of her meditations.

Christian Science! She had indeed a "touch of derision" for that philosophy and its philosophers, though it was not worth while even to deride it. Nor was her derision founded on ignorance only, for last year Alice Yardly, a friend of hers, had joined the Church, and that had seemed to Maud a most suitable thing. For she had always thought that Alice, though a dear, was a fool, and now she knew it. Certainly, however, Mrs. Yardly did not in the least resemble Mr. Cochrane either in the matter of folly, because it was clearly impossible to think of him as a fool, or in the matter of proselytising, for Mrs. Yardly used to proselytise (with almost touching ill-success) by the hour, pouring out a perfect torrent of optimistic gabble about the non-existence of pain and sickness, and be prostrated the moment afterwards by one of those nervous

headaches to which she was subject. She would boldly, trying to nail a smile to her face, label this a "false claim" (though it was a pedantically accurate imitation of the real thing), and "demonstrate" over it, which, being interpreted, meant that she assured herself two or three million times that she could not have a nervous headache, since there was no nervous headache in Divine Love, and nothing existed except Divine Love. After that she would go to bed, and wake up next morning without any headache, and be delighted with the success of the demonstration that had banished it.

And then, her dreadful delirium of words appalled and confused the hearer. Texts were torn up from their roots by that inconsequent hurricane, and sent hurtling at your head, and paragraphs from Mrs. Eddy's "Key to the Scriptures" squirted at you as from some hydrant, all to convince Maud, as far as she could see, of what she put rather differently to herself, when

she said that mind had a great influence over matter, and that Mrs. Eddy had not been the first to discover that. But this view of the question proved to be an utter mistake, and would not do for Mrs. Yardly at all, who insisted that there was no such thing as matter, and never had been, since it existed only in the error of mortal mind, of which there wasn't any really. Last winter, too, Alice had had a false claim of influenza, and after a week of demonstrating over it, and not taking ordinary precautions, it had developed into a further false claim (though a pretty imitation) of congestion of the lungs. Three weeks' further demonstration over congestion of the lungs, combined this time with stopping in bed (though that had really nothing to do with it, as could easily be explained in another hour or two), had led to her complete recovery, and the subsequent recital of this wonderful cure at a Wednesday testimony meeting, to the great edification of the faithful. But when

Maud asked her why, if she was going to condescend to stop in bed at all (especially since stopping in bed had, like the flowers of spring, "nothing to do with the case") she should not have done so when she had the false claim of influenza, instead of waiting for the further false claim of congestion, this led only to the kind Christian Science smile, and a voluble explanation, with torrents of Psalms and Mrs. Eddy, to point out once again from the very beginning that she did not have influenza at all. No further progress, in fact, could be made in such discussions, for though Mrs. Yardly was far from refusing to answer questions, she poured forth in answer so turbid a flow of pure twaddle, with so stern a determination never to be brought up to the point at issue, that it was impossible for the inquirer to proceed. All sickness and illness was inconceivable, said Mrs. Yardly, because everything was Infinite Mind (mortal mind had no more real existence than had matter); and whether Maud

asked how it was that the impression of there being such things as headaches and broken legs had come in, or whether she wanted to know why Mrs. Eddy said that tobacco was disgusting, if there was no such thing, it appeared to Alice that to state over and over again in a variety of ways this fact about Infinite Mind was a satisfactory answer to any question of whatever kind.

Of course, Alice was silly—she seemed sometimes to have no mind, mortal or otherwise, though she was a dear, all the same—and Maud, as she sat here now eating her sandwich in this sheltered nest of heather, with the wild bees buzzing about her, and all the infinite and beneficent powers of Nature pursuing their functions heedless of any interpretations that the meddlesome mind of man might choose to put upon them, felt that she had done an injustice to the subject about which she inquired when she derided it just because a woman who was very silly gave absurd answers to questions which, though quite

simple, were of the utmost profundity in that they concerned the origin of evil and sickness. Mrs. Yardly had not been a Christian Scientist long, and Maud now told herself that it was absurd to expect her all at once (for she understood so little before) to understand everything now. But what nettled her, though, indeed, she was not easily nettled, was to find that this same dear, stupid person did profess to be able to explain everything—mind, matter, and God alike. She claimed to have recaptured the faith of a child, and at once to be able to argue like a theologian about it. Maud herself was a professed and believing Christian, but had a brilliant Atheist subtly questioned her on the doctrine of the Incarnation, she knew quite well that many of his questions would be completely unanswerable. But because she was a Christian it did not follow she was a theologian, and she hoped that she would not try, by turning a blinding squirt of texts upon her questioner, to make him believe that she could explain

the mystery of the material and spiritual world. She could not—many things were mysterious. But why not say so? That these things were mysterious did not prevent her being a Christian. She believed, too, the root doctrine of Christian Science—namely, that God was the Author of the world, and was immanent there. But surely it was wiser and truer to confess that one did not understand the whole working of the world in all its details; for if one did, one could manage it all oneself. Alice Yardly, Maud felt sure, would undertake the post with the greatest pleasure. And a pretty mess she would make of it, thought she. For Alice could never even contrive that the carriage should call for anybody at the right time or place, and constantly went out to dinner on the wrong night, for the confusion of hostesses.

Yet . . . the law of gravity, so Maud believed, was in sound working order; but if one asked some mere child to explain it, and he explained

it imperfectly or incorrectly, that proved nothing against the validity of the law, but only proved the inability of the exponent. So, too, in Christian Science, one person surely knew more about it than another, and Mrs. Yardly, in all probability, less than any; and Maud confessed to herself that her present derision had been founded on the explanations (or want of them) given by a Scientist whom she had always thought silly. No doubt there were others who were not silly, but what a pity it was that the silly ones were allowed to gabble like this! Alice had tried to proselytise her, with the effect only that Maud had been almost fanatically convinced of the absurdity of her faith. But Mr. Cochrane had pointedly refused to proselytise, and, perversely enough, she felt she would like to hear what he had to say about it. He, too, had that childlike faith and those childlike eyes. Alice's eyes were not childlike: they resembled the shining buttons in railway-carriages.

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A great fish jumped clear out of the water in the pool at her feet—a noble silver-sided salmon, which for the moment made her fisherman's heart leap in her throat. But it was no use trying for him; a fish that jumped like that never took the fly. Besides, she had no gaff. Then she smiled at herself, for she knew that, though that reason was sound enough, it was not the real cause why she still sat in her sheltered place. She was interested in something else: she wanted to think about that.

Mr. Cochrane did not seem silly; in fact, she would have bet on the verdict of an intelligent and impartial jury with regard to the point. What if she asked him, when he came to dine to-morrow night, a few of the questions onto which Alice had turned the squirt of irrelevant texts? There would be no derision on her side now, for in this half-hour of self-communing she had convinced herself that she wanted to know. There

was no such thing as illness—he had said that; he had practically told Duncan that. What, then, if she made an appeal to him—told him how many of these poor folk had died from typhoid, and were suffering now, and asked him to stop it all? Yet that was too much to ask; it seemed profane, as if she asked him to invest himself in the insignia of Divinity. But might he not—for she could ask him now without derision, without, so far as she could manage it, unbelief in the huge power which Christian Scientists (healers, at any rate) distinctly professed to wield—might he not relieve one sufferer, make well one of those forty who would be lying sick in the house to-morrow? But then there occurred to her the parrot-like answer of Alice Yardly when she had asked her the same question. It *was* parrot-like, it was glib and without conviction and sense of the true meaning of the words, when she said it was wrong to make a "cure" for a sign. Lots of texts from the Gospels, of course, came up as re-

inforcements. But how hopelessly she misunderstood! Maud did not want a sign: she wanted that suffering should be relieved. It was not human to withhold that power merely because she would be interested in seeing it manifested. It was inhuman to withhold it, if the possessor really believed it was his. Besides, for what, except its exercise, had it been given?

But there was Thurso. It was better that he should not know that she intended to ask Mr. Cochrane to do this, and, indeed, that he should not know that she had asked it. There Alice Yardly's contention, again with texts, seemed to her to be possibly true. It was reasonable, anyhow, to suppose that unbelief might hamper the power of faith, just as dampness hindered the functions of frictional electricity. But if Thurso was not told, there would be none of this impeding counteraction. She herself did not disbelieve, and honestly she wanted to believe. She derided

no longer: she was at the bar of conscience able to say that she had an open mind on the subject. She believed in the miraculous cures of ancient days; there was no known reason why modern days should not witness them again.

Yet why had her mind changed? Why had the derision vanished? Again she was truthful with herself, and acknowledged that it was probably owing to Mr. Cochrane's personality. He seemed wise and gentle and self-reliant because he relied on an Infinite Power. He himself entirely trusted in that Power, and it was exactly that which made Maud trust him.

Yes, that was all. She had gone over the ground she wished to traverse. Thereafter she was absorbed in watching her fly traverse another element.

CHAPTER III.

THE shifting and removal of furniture and the banishment of carpets preparatory to the reception of patients next day, together with the installation of the necessaries for sick-rooms, were complete when Maud got home that evening, and she found Dr. Symes, who had come up to superintend this, just on the point of leaving. He had no very cheering account to give concerning several of the patients whom Maud asked after, but there was one cause, at least, for thankfulness, since no fresh case had appeared during the day.

"And that is rather strange," he said, "for we have not yet been able to discover what the cause of the epidemic was, and so have not intentionally

cut off any source of infection. But, God knows, I am quite content not to know what it is, provided it is cut off."

"Yes, indeed," said she. "And to-morrow you will fill up all the beds here?"

"Yes, all, I am sorry to say. Of course, we are taking certain risks, but, for the sake of the fresher air and better attention they will be able to receive up here, we shall move some very serious cases. Ah, my dear lady, we doctors get sick at heart sometimes! Doctor though I am, and prescriber of drugs, I wonder how much good we really do with our powders and potions. I wonder if all the contents of all the chemists' shops, and our cabalistic prescriptions, are measurable by the side of fresh air and quiet, and the conviction on the part of the patient that he is going to get well."

"But if he believes that the drugs are going to make him well, surely they are a spring of faith," said she.

He laughed.

"Well, well, they may get better how they choose, and I won't quarrel with it," he said. "By the way, I should like to say just once how splendid it is of you and Lord Thurso to give up the house like this."

"It was absolutely Thurso's idea," said she, "though, of course, it seemed obvious when he suggested it. And he wanted to send me back to town! Has he come in yet, do you know?"

"Yes, he came in half an hour ago, in great pain, I fear, with one of those neuralgic headaches. He is rather overdone; he wants rest."

Maud made a little quick movement towards him.

"Not seriously so?" she asked. "You don't mean that there is anything to be anxious about?"

"I don't, anyhow, want you to be anxious," said he, "but as long as he is continually anxious himself, and gets constantly tired, those headaches will probably be rather frequent. He has had

attacks during these last three days, and pain like that is good for nobody. I certainly hope he will get rest soon. We do not want it to become chronic."

"Chronic?"

"Yes; your nerves, you know, form habits, like everything else."

Maud was silent a moment; an anxiety she had felt while she was waiting for Thurso to come in last night reminded her again of its presence. She did not much want to speak of it, but, after all, she was speaking to the old doctor whom she had known since she was a child. Also, she very much wanted to be reassured.

"He takes laudanum when he is in great pain," she said. "Is that wise?"

"It would be unwise of him to do so frequently, or continue doing so for long. There, again, is a reason why we do not want his nerves to form the habit of pain. I did not know, by

the way, that he took it. It was prescribed for him, of course."

"Oh yes; I know it was."

Dr. Symes seemed to dismiss that from his mind.

"Then it is no business of mine," he said. "Now I hope—and to-day there is cause for hoping—that we have seen the worst of this epidemic. There has been no fresh case to-day, so before many days are over I think Lord Thurso can get away. I tell you frankly that I shall be glad when he can."

"Ought he to go now, do you think?" asked Maud.

Dr. Symes considered this before he replied.

"No, I think he ought to stop here," he said at length. "It is true he is running a certain danger of producing a chronic irritation and—how shall I say it?—exasperation of nerves. Also, there is a certain risk in continuing to take laudanum. But, after all, he is sensible, and he is

certainly brave, and I think for the present his sense of duty is right in keeping him here. Our orders and the nurses' orders are obeyed when they know he is here and is backing us up. You have no idea of the difficulties we had before you and he came. Well, I must get back to the village again. And, Lady Maud, I like plucky people like you and your brother. Good night. The patients will begin to arrive early to-morrow."

Dr. Symes, brisk and active for all his sixty years and grey head, hopped nimbly onto his bicycle, and rode off, feeling that Maud had done him good. Apart from the Raynhams, his notions of the British aristocracy were founded on those curious volumes known as society novels, books which his wife read aloud to him in the evening with horrified gusto. These works presented this class in a more lurid but less pleasant

light. But Lord Thurso and his sister were both so simple and so good, to use that ordinary word in its most ordinary sense. They made no more fuss over the reception of forty patients suffering from typhoid into the house than they would have made over a few friends dropping in to tea. No thought of risk or inconvenience seemed to have occurred to either of them; it appeared to them the most natural thing in the world that the house should be turned into a hospital, and though professionally he believed that there was no risk, still he felt that the wicked countesses and marchionesses in "Lepers" or "Lady Babylon" would not have behaved quite like this. Indeed, for one half moment he let himself wonder what even Mrs. Symes would have said if he had suggested taking cases into their house. But it had seemed to that beautiful girl whom he had left on the doorstep with her fishing-rod in one hand and a landing-net weighed down with half a dozen sea-trout in the other a perfectly natural

thing to do. It was this courageous acceptation of events that did him good.

Thurso, to his sister's great relief, came down to dinner in the most equable and cheerful spirits. All trace of his headache had vanished, and Maud thought that Dr. Symes must have been mistaken about it, for, as he had said, he had only guessed that Thurso must be in great pain. In any case, it was her part to try to take his thoughts away from fever and neuralgia, and all the darker side of things, and she instantly began on her own poaching comedy by the river.

"Thurso, I have broken the record to-day," she said. "I have done the most awful thing that has ever been done. After you went out this morning, I took a rod down to the river to look about for sea-trout, and was firm in a salmon —oh no, he saw me hook it—when Mr. Bertie Cochrane appeared. How could you forget to tell me you had let the fishing? There I was,

tied to it—to his fish. He watched me play it. And, of course, I didn't know him from Adam."

For the moment Thurso was almost as horrified as Maud had been.

"Good Lord!" he said; "I hope you lost the fish."

"Not at all. It was entirely owing to Mr. Cochrane that I landed it, for in the nick of time down came Duncan—his gillie, not ours at all—with a gaff. Mr. Cochrane looked on with interest and sympathy."

Thurso had laid down his knife and fork, and a huge grin was beginning to take the place of his horror.

"Go on, quick," he said.

"I will. Mr. Cochrane had a rod, and I said I supposed he was going over to Scarsdale. No, he was not. So, with a slight addition of stiffness, I thanked him for his help, but said that this was your river. He explained. Oh, Thurso,

did you ever? And I asked him to come and dine to-morrow, and eat some of his own fish. He is coming."

Thurso shouted with laughter.

"Oh, what would I not give to have been there when the light broke on you!" he said. "And to ask him to dinner—add insult to injury! You were caught poaching—poaching, you know—and then you ask the rightful owner to have some. Did you tell him, by the way, that we were a typhoid hospital?"

"Yes; he didn't mind."

"Oh, Maud—oh, Maud! An American, too! He will probably telegraph an account of it to the New York press, and it will come out all over the States with enormous headlines!"

"Oh, I think not," said she. "I'm sure he wouldn't do it."

Thurso recollected his own meeting with Cochrane.

"No, I don't think he would," he said. "Be-

cause I met him in the village yesterday evening, and I agree he doesn't look like that. Go on."

"Isn't that enough?" she asked. "Afterwards we sat and talked as if I hadn't been caught poaching at all. He begged me to go on fishing, too, and he did it, somehow, so simply and naturally that I thanked him and did go on. I caught six sea-trout, too, and we're just going to have some of them. He really made it easy for me to say 'Yes.' In fact, it would have been absurd to say 'No.'"

Thurso laughed again.

"That almost beats everything," he said. "You are absolutely brazen."

"Not in the least. When you see Mr. Cochrane you will understand how simple it was."

"I have seen him, as I told you. It occurred to me then that we might ask him to dinner. It was that I began to suggest last night, but you were so curious to know what I was going to say that I stopped."

Maud looked at him reproachfully.

"Oh, Thurso, if you had gone on you would have saved me from all this!" she said. "But don't you understand how it was possible for me to accept?"

Thurso considered.

"Yes, even though I did not speak to him, I think perhaps I do. He did look to be the sort of man whose sea-trout you might catch after he had caught you poaching his salmon. That is rather a high compliment. It is a great gift to be able to make people not ashamed of themselves. I should have absolutely sunk into the earth."

"And Mr. Cochrane would very kindly have pulled you out," said Maud. "At least, he pulled me out."

There was a short pause, during which Maud occupied her mouth with sea-trout and her mind with the question as to whether she should tell Thurso that Mr. Cochrane was a Christian

Scientist. But his remark that it was not his plan to proselytise decided her against doing so. Then Thurso spoke again.

"Do you know, to-day is the first on which I haven't felt absolutely swamped and water-logged with depression and anxiety?" he said. "There has been no fresh case since morning, and Duncan's wife, who, like Sandie, was almost despaired of, has taken a sudden inexplicable turn for the better. She was dying of sheer exhaustion from fever, and now all day she has been gaining strength—gaining it quickly, too, though you would have said there was no strength left. I saw Duncan this evening. He—really, I wondered whether he had been drinking."

"Drinking?" asked Maud. "Why, he is a teetotaller!"

"The worst sort of drunkard," remarked Thurso rather cynically.

"Oh, don't be cheap!"

Thurso looked up at her, and then nodded.

"Quite right," he said; "it's a pity. Sorry."

"You old darling! But Duncan's as sober as I am. Soberer. Go on. It interests me."

"Well, it all leads back to Mr. Cochrane again," he said. "Don't interrupt. I looked in to-night, as I told you, and there was Duncan sitting by his wife's bedside, nursing the baby, who was, with extraordinary gurgles, trying to swarm up his beard. And his wife lay there, different, changed, with life instead of death in her face. But fancy bringing a baby into a room where there is typhoid! So I got Duncan and the child out, and cursed him, and told him that his wife was really on the mend, as the nurse had just told me. I thought he would like to know that, but apparently he had known it all day. Our Mr. Cochrane had told him this morning that his wife was getting better all the time."

"Yes, I heard him tell him," said Maud.

"Well, but how did he know?" asked Thurso. "Twelve hours ago they thought she couldn't live

through the day. And what the deuce has our Mr. Cochrane got to do with it? Who is he? What is he? How did he know?"

Maud had no reply to this at once; "our Mr. Cochrane" had repudiated preaching on his own account—clearly, then, it was not her business to state his views.

"Well, he hasn't done any harm, anyhow," she said.

"Of course not; but it's an odd coincidence. Mr. Cochrane tells Duncan that his wife is getting better, and Duncan has only got to walk home, and finds it is so. Oh, and another thing: Dr. Symes called there this afternoon, and Duncan kindly but quite firmly refused to let him in at all unless he promised not to give her any more medicine. So he promised, because when he saw her last she was absolutely past all hope; also, he doesn't much believe in medicines, though you needn't mention it. He saw, of course, the enormous improvement, and wanted to take her

temperature, but Duncan again firmly, and with beaming smiles, would not allow it. I suppose he considered a thermometer a sort of modified medicine."

"Well?"

"Dr. Symes insisted, and eventually Duncan, with great respect, threw the thermometer out of the window. That is why I supposed he was drunk."

"No, I'm sure he wasn't drunk," said Maud. "Go on, dear."

They had finished dinner, and Thurso rose to get a cigarette.

"That's the end," he said. "Dr. Symes tells me he has seen that sort of recovery before, but what is odd is that our Mr. Cochrane should have foreseen it. Is he a crank, do you think, or a spiritualist, or some sort of innocent lunatic?"

Again Maud mentally reviewed her decision not to do Mr. Cochrane's preaching (which he

would not do for himself) for him, and again endorsed her policy.

"How do you expect me to know?" she asked. "I talked to him for ten minutes. But he's coming to dine to-morrow, and you can judge for yourself. And how have you been? No headache?"

He glanced at her sharply and sideways a moment, with a movement of vague suspicion.

"Headache?" he said; "I haven't seemed much like headache this evening, have I? Why?"

"Only Dr. Symes told me he was afraid you were in pain. I am delighted he was mistaken."

Thurso shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord, what bad guesses a skilful doctor makes!" he said. "He half wants people to be ill, so that he may have the pleasure of curing them."

Maud naturally asked no further question, and told herself that Dr. Symes had simply made what Thurso called a "bad guess." But, knowing them

both, it seemed to her odd that he should have thought that Thurso had been suffering if he had not. For it was only when he was in the extremes of pain that anyone could guess that he was on the rack, for it had to be strongly screwed before he visibly winced. For one moment it flashed through her mind that he had been in pain, had perhaps taken laudanum to stop it, and had—well, not chosen to tell her so. Yet his answer, though as a matter of fact it was slightly evasive in form, clearly bore the construction that he had been free from pain all day. So she dismissed that at once, telling herself that it was scandalous of her, though involuntarily only and momentarily, to suspect Thurso of insincerity. Thus, the pause only lasted a moment before she spoke of something else. But in that moment he had said to himself, "Shall I tell her?"

The two sat up rather late that night, for Maud disliked going to bed nearly as much as

she disliked getting up, and it was usually Thurso who moved the adjournment. But to-night he was extraordinarily alert; as he had said, to-day had been the first on which there had been any break in the tempest of illness which was devastating the village, and his spirits seemed to have risen in sympathy, enabling him to think and speak of other things than the immediate preoccupations which surrounded them. And chief among these was London and the reopening of Thurso House. His father, the late Earl, had died just a year ago, and next week the house was to celebrate its re-entry into London life with an adequately magnificent ball. His wife, who had stopped in town, was seeing to all arrangements, and when Catherine undertook to see to a thing, it was unnecessary for anyone else, however closely concerned, to feel any anxiety as to the completeness with which it would be seen to.

"I heard from Catherine this morning," he said—"at least, I heard from her typewriter. She

did not even sign it. She is up to the eyes in a million affairs, and hopes I am well. Really it seems to me that most of the festivities, as well as all the charities of London would collapse unless she saw to them. And there's the ball next week. I shall go up for the night, though whether I stop depends on how things go on here. Of course, you'll come."

Maud looked at him in mild surprise; it was as if he had said, "Of course, you'll have breakfast to-morrow."

"It is *not* improbable," she said. "Or did you really suppose that your house was going to make its debut again, and me not there?"

"Oh, well, I didn't know," he said.

"You do now. What fun it will be! It will be crammed with kings and queens like 'Alice in Wonderland.' Thurso, what a good thing Catherine is so smart! I hate the word, but she is: she is magnificent. She said the other day that there are only two sorts of entertaining possible—the

one where you have a great party, with kings and queens, and everybody in orders and tiaras; and the other where it is just tea-gowns and two or three real friends. I don't believe she has ever had a party at which there were more than eight people and less than forty."

"It's usually not less than forty," remarked Thurso.

"Oh no; it's often less than eight. Of course I shall come. Do have a special all the way to town; it will be so expensive! Catherine—I must quote her again—says, 'Either have a special or go third.'"

"With a preference for specials?"

"Not at all. She doesn't care which it is. She often goes third, and talks to the people. And on the tops of omnibuses. But she doesn't go in cabs: she says they are middling, like parties of twenty to meet a Serene Transparency. If she can't have the twenty-five million horse-power motor, up she gets on the omnibus. She never

stops it, either, because of the horses. She runs after it, and jumps quite beautifully. I do admire her so."

Thurso laughed.

"So do I. And it's something to admire your wife when you have been married twelve years!"

Maud made a little sideways movement in her chair, as if her position had become suddenly uncomfortable. Her brother continued.

"I don't believe a woman ever existed who was so obviously admirable," he said. "We went to the opera together the night before I came up here, and as she was going on to some large ball afterwards, she was—well, suitably dressed."

Maud felt, as she always felt when Thurso talked like this, as if a file had been drawn across her teeth. She tried to turn, not the conversation, but its tone.

"Oh, how?" she asked, with deep and genuine interest; for, like all sensible girls, she loved

beautiful clothes, especially when beautiful people wore them. "She always makes everybody else look dowdy or overdressed. That must be such fun."

"Well, she had the diamond palisade, as she calls it, in her hair, and what she calls the ruby plaster all, all down her."

"Yes, but her dress?" said Maud. "I know the plaster."

"Her dress? Goodness knows what it was made of, but it looked—you know what whipped cream looks like compared to cream—it looked like whipped gold. Sort of froth of gold: not yellow, but gold. Melba was in the middle of the jewel-song when we came in, but at the end of it nobody was paying the slightest attention to her. Every glass in the house was turned on Catherine."

He got up and threw his cigarette-end away.

"And she's my wife," he added; and the four words carried tons of irony.

Maud got up also. She hated this: it was the process of the file again. She knew that Thurso talked to no one but her like that, but she deplored that he felt like that.

"Oh, it is such a pity, dear," she said.

"That she's my wife?"

"Oh, Thurso, don't! All the worst of you spoke then. No, a pity that you feel like that. You are both such splendid people, really. And——"

"And I bore her, and she gets on my nerves," he remarked.

Maud gave a little frown and gesture of disapproval.

"You should never say such things," she said. "It is a mistake to say them just because they are—well, partly true. If they were untrue it would not matter. But to let yourself say a true thing, when that thing is a pity, only makes it more real. Speech confirms everything. Good gracious! if people would only hold their tongues

on unpleasant topics, how the things themselves would improve! Oh, I am a philosopher."

He looked at her with great tenderness and affection.

"Are you?" he said. "I like you, anyhow. Go on."

Maud gave a long sigh.

"You don't do her justice," she said, "any more than she does you justice. You don't allow for each other. And—Thurso, I don't believe she is happy any more than you are."

"Why do you think that? She carves forty-eight hours out of every day, and fills them all, while the world looks on in envious admiration. That is her ideal, and she always attains it. And even her husband claps his hands."

Maud took him by the shoulders and shook him gently.

"Idiot!" she said—"dreadful idiot! Shut up! I am going to bed. Thank me for catching so many beautiful fish."

"I am not sure that I thank you for asking Mr. Cochrane to dinner to-morrow," he said. "I love these quiet evenings with you."

"Thanks, dear. I get on tolerably, too. Good night. What a nice day it has been, and what nice things we've got to think about to send us to sleep! No fresh case of typhoid to-day for the people, and no headache for you, and a salmon for me. I am so sleepy that I don't mind going to bed."

"Maud," he began, then stopped.

No, he could not tell her. In himself he was ashamed of having taken laudanum, and was ashamed, also, of having deceived her, for he saw he had done that. Since, then, he was ashamed of it, there was no need that she should know.

"Well?"

"No, it's nothing."

"Thurso, your manners are atrocious!" she said. "Both yesterday and to-day you have begun to say something, and then stopped. I shall keep

doing that all to-morrow, and you will see how maddening it is."

He laughed again.

"Good night, dear old boy," said she.

The next day was wholly given up to the installation of the typhoid patients. Carpets, rugs, and curtains had been rolled up, unnecessary furniture removed, and beds brought up and down from the basement and the higher floors, so that the utmost accommodation might be provided in the big rooms on the first-floor. Dr. Symes, in consultation with the other doctors, had settled that it was better to run a little risk, and move even bad cases up here, since the day was dry and warm, for the sake of the more immediate attention and greater abundance of fresh air than was possible when patients were scattered about in tiny cottage-rooms, and the ambulance, going backwards and forwards all day, brought grave burdens. But by five in the afternoon the work

of transportation was done, and the house was full. Afterwards the doctors went the round of the whole house, and found the results satisfactory. Not one, apparently, had suffered from the move, and now, instead of the patients being in small, ill-ventilated rooms, they were airily housed, with every facility for constant supervision from the nurses. Most, too, were going on well; but there was one case, that of Sandie the gillie, which was as serious as it could be. As often when the strong are ill, it seemed as if the fever, vampire-like, sucked out his strength and itself thrived and grew strong on it; and Dr. Symes, before he left, had given orders that he should be sent for at once if any further unfavourable symptoms occurred. Duncan's wife, it is true, had been through a passage no less perilous that very morning, but, with every wish to be hopeful, it was unlikely that two should be snatched from the very snap of the jaws of death.

Thurso had been in the house all day, and when the move was finished he went down into the room where he and Maud lived, feeling desperately tired, and intending to get an hour's sleep before dinner. But to have an intention, however strong, laudable, and innocent, does not imply that the very best efforts are able to put it into effect; and instead, in this instance, he had no sooner composed himself to sleep than he felt that, though the surface of his brain was drowsy and tired beyond all words, something below was broadly and staringly awake.

He had lain down on the sofa with his face averted from the light and his eyes shut, so as to give the utmost welcome to sleep, but it was not sleep that came, but a series of vivid though unreal images, born of memory. First an interminable series of stretchers, each with its swathed, fever-stricken burden, came up the stairs, and just when he was beginning to feel that this monotonous procession was the precursor of sleep,

another image twitched him and claimed his attention. Maud had gone fishing, poaching, yesterday, and had enjoyed good sport; thus the procession of stretchers gave way to the vision of her landing fish after fish, all dead-beat, all silver-sided, till it seemed that this iteration, too, must end in unconsciousness. But something jarred it, and, instead, Catherine stood at the head of the stairs in Thurso House, dressed in rubies, with a sort of "love-in-the-mist" of gold round her, receiving kings and queens, and queens and kings, all in crowns. But that, again, ended, not in slumber, but in something very antagonistic to it. There was just a little stab—it was hardly pain—inside his head, as remote as the sound of an electric bell in the basement. Then it was repeated, but this time louder and more insistently, as if the ringer, on the one hand, was impatient, and as if the bell was beginning to come up the back-stairs. Then—it was right to call it pain now—the sound grew louder, and the finger

pressed the bell more firmly, while the bell itself came closer. He was quite wide awake now, surface of brain and secret cells alike, and he opened his eyes. Then he said out loud:

"I am in for another."

That seemed to be the case, for the prediction began to be instantly fulfilled. The half-drowsy similitude of the electric bell vanished, and instead there was pain—clear, clean pain. It stabbed half a dozen times with a firm, practised touch, as a pianist strikes a chord or two before he begins his piece. Then it paused for a moment. Immediately afterwards it began again, but differently. Instead of stabbing at the nerve, it laid a cold, steady finger on it, and that finger grew quietly steadier and colder, till something inside his head seemed to ring with it, as a musical glass rings when it is adroitly stroked. Then came a brilliant passage of all sorts of pain, as if the orchestra had begun to accompany that masterly solo. Then, as the horn holds a long,

lazy, piercing note, pain pierced and dwelt in him, while wonderful arpeggios of torture from neighbouring nerves crossed it. That was the prelude.

In his room upstairs, which he could reach in ten seconds, there stood on his dressing-table a bottle, not very large, which contained not only the antidote and instant cure of his suffering, but also blissful content and the gift of ecstatic well-being. But the very fact that yesterday he had so lightly (or so it seemed now) had recourse to that, deceiving Maud, and had uncorked Paradise, made him at this moment brace himself against the temptation of resorting to it again. If he had got to bear pain—and it really appeared just now that he had—then he would set his teeth and bear it, sooner than, at the cost of another step in the formation of a damnable habit, drug himself into remission from his pain, or, what even now, when he was suffering hell, tempted him more closely, into that sense of divine har-

mony of being that the drug gave him. He longed that the pain should cease; he longed even more for that seventh heaven of content. It was all in that small bottle, with its brown elixir.

Then his desire disguised itself, and made a more insidious approach. There was a guest coming to dinner to-night. He could not simply retire to bed, leaving Maud to entertain Mr. Cochrane alone, nor, on the other hand, did it seem to him to be physically possible that he should be able to sit through dinner if in this state, for already the beads of anguish were thick upon him. And he knew well that this was but the prelude; it was only an orchestral performance. Soon the curtain would go up; the singers would be there too. It was intolerable enough now; he had never known so full an orchestra. Yet he could stifle them, he could extinguish the singers, by a little draught, a swallowing in the throat.

But his will, his intention, remained firm. He

was not going to silence them like that. For now he knew quite well that his desire for the drug was acute, not only because of the blessed relief from pain that it would give him, but because of the intense physical enjoyment that it brought. Then, with head splitting and buzzing with pain, he went upstairs to dress and make ready to entertain his guest. There were forty other guests, too, in the house, but those were well looked after. Also they were in bed, lucky devils!

Breeding, and what is implied by that much-abused word, includes courage of a quiet but rather heroic kind, since it has no stirring aids to help it, no moral trumpets and drums to stimulate it to its shining deeds. Yet it demands a greater command of self, a greater obedience to the courtesies of life, to be courageous in hum-drum and unexciting circumstances than in those to which romance and adventure are auxiliary; and

certainly to-night Thurso's perfectly natural and even gravely convivial manner towards his guest and his sister, while he himself was suffering pain of the most excruciating kind, was courage that in its small and difficult sphere deserved some sort of domestic Victoria Cross. Though most people have more manliness than they themselves or anybody else would have credited them with when pain has got to be borne, or a heart-rending situation faced, yet to have the ready smile, the attentive ear, the genial manner, under such circumstances is a fine exhibition of the courage of good breeding. More than this, too, Thurso had faced before dinner, when the little bottle on his dressing-table reminded him that pain need not be borne a moment longer than he chose.

But all through dinner Thurso achieved the outward signs of inward well-being, and it was through no remissness or failure on his part, but by instinct born of intimate knowledge on Maud's,

that she knew he was going through hells of physical torture. Sometimes he just bit his lip or suddenly stroked his long moustache; sometimes in the middle of a sentence he would make a pause that was scarcely noticeable, as if he but considered for a word; sometimes he gripped knife and fork so that the skin over his knuckles showed white; but that was all. He talked quite easily and naturally, made reference to Maud's poaching expedition, and its satisfactory results as far as dinner was concerned, for the salmon was excellent, and went on to speak of the epidemic which had brought them both up North.

"But at last it shows some sign of abating," he said, "though we are still ignorant of the source of it. In fact, there has been no fresh case either to-day or yesterday."

Maud looked up at Mr. Cochrane, wishing rather intently that he would preach his gospel. She felt that it might do Thurso good, or, at any rate, take his mind off the pain that flickered

round him like a shower of daggers. But the gospel was veiled, at any rate.

"I think it is so good of you to bring the cases up here," he said. "Lady Maud told me yesterday that you were doing so. I am sure it must help towards recovery to remove people from surroundings which they associate with illness to fresh, bright places."

He paused a moment.

"One sees that every day," he said. "If you associate a place with pleasure, you are pleased to go there again. The mind, left to itself, clings so strongly to material things. If one has been happy in a certain room, one thinks that those surroundings will tend to produce happiness again. It is one of the illusions we get rid of last."

Thurso began to speak.

"You mean," he said, and then stopped, for an access of pain so sharp seized him that he could not get on.

Maud saw, and gave him a sudden quick look of sympathy, which annoyed him, and, for the first time, Cochrane saw too. But after a moment he recovered himself, and went on.

"You mean I shall always associate this house with typhoid and sick, suffering people?" he asked. "That is not very cheering."

Bertie Cochrane smiled, looking with those happy, childlike eyes first at Maud, then at his host.

"No, I mean just the opposite," he said. "You will always associate this house with recovery, with the sweeping away of illness and pain."

Dinner was at an end, and the pause of cigarette-lighting followed. Bertie Cochrane had taken one as he spoke, but he did not light it, and laid it down again on the cloth. Then he got up.

"Lord Thurso, you are wonderfully brave," he said. "I am sure you feel in horrible pain. Let

me go right away now. I have enjoyed coming up to dine with Lady Maud and you ever so much."

For the last minute or two the pain had become so much more acute that Thurso's forehead dripped with perspiration. All dinner, too, the longing, the drunkard's desire, to get to his room and take a dose from that healing bottle had been growing like some nightmare figure. And now, when his pain, in spite of all his gallant efforts to conceal it, was discovered, the desire became overwhelming—he could no longer master it.

"Pray don't think of going away," he said, "but if you will excuse me for a few minutes, I think I will go upstairs. I have some medicine there that never fails to set me right, and I shall be down again quite shortly. Yes, I may as well confess it, the pain has been pretty bad."

For one moment it appeared that Cochrane had something on the tip of his tongue, for he turned eagerly to Thurso, who had risen, and was

wiping his face. But it was clear to Maud, when he did speak, that he was not giving expression to the original impulse.

"I shall be delighted to stop," he said, "if Lady Maud does not mind my being on her hands. I wanted so much to ask about one or two of the pools on the river."

Thurso left the room, and Cochrane turned to her with the same eagerness as he had shown a minute ago.

"I am so willing, so eager to treat your brother," he said, "but I didn't like suggesting it to him. I did not know if he would not think me some very special kind of lunatic."

Maud shook her head. She knew quite well it would be perfectly idle to suggest such a thing to Thurso, and, indeed, to her sense, too, there was something unthinkable about calling into play the power that rules the world in order to cure neuralgia. Besides, the poppy-juice, though she did not wholly like his taking it, would do that,

The other was like cracking your egg for breakfast with a steam-hammer.

"Oh, thank you very much," she said, "but his medicine always puts him right."

And she instantly turned the conversation to the subject he had suggested, and spoke of certain pools in the river which he had found difficulty in fishing satisfactorily.

Thurso, meantime, half blind with pain, had almost run to his room, for he longed for the relief which awaited him there as the desert-parched traveller longs for water. And keenly as he desired the cessation of pain, much more keenly did he thirst for the ecstatic sense of well-being that the drug produced. All day, even before this racking neuralgia came on, he had been almost unable to think of anything but that. He had thirsted all day for that stimulated consciousness, that huge, vivid sense of happiness, which already seemed to him the proper, normal level of life. Already, too, he was beginning to be dishonest

with himself, just as yesterday he had been dishonest with Maud; and even as he poured it out he told himself, knowing it was untrue, that he would not be taking it if Mr. Cochrane had not been dining with them. It was inhospitable and impossible to send him away five minutes after dinner; it was equally impossible that he should spend the evening alone with Maud. And though that, so far as it went, was true, it was not the essential truth.

He took the glass in his hand, torturing himself, now that relief was near and assured, with voluntary delay, even as the caged beast which has been roaring for its meat sits fierce and snarling when it has been given it before it begins to assuage the hunger-pangs which it now knows it can satisfy, and deliberately prolonged for a moment more this stabbing pain. He sat down in an easy-chair, and put his feet up on another, in order to make himself quite comfortable before he drank it. His room looked north-west, and they

had dined early, so that the sun still shone in at his window, flooding the room in cool crystal light. Then he drank.

Inside his head during this last hour he felt as if a sort of piston-rod from a cylinder had been making firm strokes onto some bleeding, mangled nerve. The end of the piston-rod was fitted sometimes with a blunt hammer, so that it crushed the nerve, sometimes with a sharp needle-point which went deeper, and seemed to penetrate the very home and heart of pain. Then perhaps the piston-rod would cease for a few seconds, while an iron-toothed, rusty rake collected the smashed fragments of nerve together again, so that the hammer should not fail to hit them squarely, and made a neat little pyramid of the pieces on the place where it would descend. This raking together (the image was so vivid to him that he almost believed that it actually took place) was about the worst part. He knew that in a minute the hammer would begin again. But now, a few moments only after

he had taken his dose, the change began. Though the hammer did not cease to fall, its blows no longer produced pain. They produced instead a warm, tingling sensation, like that which the hand feels when it spreads out icy fingers to a friendly blaze. And that tingling warmth felt its way gradually through his head, passed down his neck, and slowly flooded body and limbs to toe and finger tip. He forgot what pain meant; he was unable to realise even before the piston-rod ceased to beat what it connoted, knowing only what the oncoming of this tide of physical bliss was like.

Every sense, too, was quickened and stimulated. The sun that still shone in at his windows burned with a ruddier and more mellow light. The glory of it was soft but incredibly brilliant, and to his quickened sense of smell the air that came in through the open sash was redolent with the honey-scent of warm heather. The blind had been a little drawn down over the top of the window, but whereas, when he was dressing for

dinner an hour ago, the sound of it flapping against the frame was a fretting and irritating thing, it now seemed to him to give out flute-like and vibrating notes, while the taste of the cigarette which he had lit five minutes ago, and brought up with him, had a flavour new and exquisite. The present moment, and the sensations of it, were all quickened into the vividness of dream-life, while it was but vaguely that he remembered that downstairs Maud was sitting with a very pleasant American fellow who had come to dinner. At dinner he remembered, but again vaguely, that he was not sure if he liked him; now he appeared to be the most charming of companions. But with the gates of Paradise here upstairs flung wide for his reception, he could not fix his mind very clearly on him. No doubt, if he made an effort, he could recall more about him, and remember his name, which just now eluded him; but an effort was the one thing he certainly would not make, since it might disturb or destroy this

perfect equilibrium on which he was balanced. And there was really no reason, so it now appeared, why he should go downstairs again. Maud and her poaching friend would talk about fishing for awhile, and then he—ah, yes! Bertie Cochrane—would go away. They would both easily understand his own non-appearance. He had suffered tortures; no inquisitor or master of the rack would refuse to grant him this little rest and compensation.

Then for a moment his breeding and the habit of his whole life jerked him to his feet, with the intention of rejoining them, as courtesy and decorum demanded. But the drug he had taken was already more powerful than they. It told him with authority that this ecstasy of consciousness would be trespassed on and interfered with by the presence of others. It would, if he went downstairs, be necessary for him to some extent to give attention to them instead of letting himself be absorbed in the exquisiteness of his own

sensations. And those sensations had nothing in common with the dulled perceptions of sleep or intoxication. He was lifted onto a plane more vivified than the normal; he basked in super-solar sunlight.

Then, still without any suggestion of sleepiness or intoxicated consciousness, the most wonderful visions, or, rather, the intentional visualisation of scenes and moods magic in their beauty, passed in front of him. He, turned into Keats himself, was listening to the nightingale, and losing himself in "embalmed darkness" to the charmed music of the immortal song. "The weariness, the fever and the fret," were remembered only as the traveller arrived at his long-desired home remembers the weariness of the way. His spirit seemed to draw away from life, though still intensely living, and he was in love with death, that but loosed it from the impediment of the body. Then a curve was suddenly turned, and next moment he was mounting higher than the blithe

spirit of the lark could carry it, and hung in some clear interstellar ether so remote that the sun above him and the earth below seemed about equal in size, and the shape of England and the coasts of Europe were visible as in a map, set in dim blue sea. Then, still mounting, he turned his eye upward, and looked undazzled into the high noon of the heavens, and yet, though it was noon, the infinite velvet vault was sown with the sparkle of stars. Sun and stars shone there together, and a slip of crescent moon made the company of heaven complete.

Again, still vividly awake, and without the least hint of drowsiness, the aspect of the firmament was changed, and the stars became globules of sparkling dew, and the empty spaces of ether took shape, until above him that which had been the heavens was transformed into a huge bed of blue acanthus-leaves, on which the dew of the stars lay sparkling. The sun was still there in the centre of all, and round it the sky took the

shape of the petals of a flower. It was the "centre spike of gold" in an immense blue blossom, which was thick with petals as a rose, and pure of shape as a daffodil. All this, too—this vision to which the hosts of heaven contributed —was his own, born of his own brain, which so short a time ago was bound on the rack of torture and sordid suffering. But now that was nothing. He remembered he had been in pain, but no more, and how cheaply had he purchased, at the price of but copper coin, these jewels of consciousness. That little draught which relieved him of physical pain had brought him these astounding joys; it had made the whole machinery of the universe to serve his vision. The stars were drops of dew on the acanthus-leaves of infinite space, and the sun burned in the centre of this unique flower. A few minutes ago he had half started to go downstairs; now the ravings of any lunatic in Bedlam were not more distant from his mind than such a thought. He was absorbed

in that contemplation of things which the brain, with the aid he had given it, can re-create out of the objects it is used to see without wonder. But this was the real world, easy of entry to those who had the sense to turn the key; while the material world was a dream, vague and pale, compared to this reality.

Meantime, below, Bertie Cochrane and Maud had for some ten minutes talked unmitigated fishing; but Maud, though in general to talk fishing was to her one of the most entrancing forms of conversation, provided she talked to a real fisherman, as she was now doing, was giving lip-service only to the subject, for inwardly she regretted the finality of those few little frozen words about Thurso with which she had so successfully dismissed the subject of Christian Science and all the matter of Duncan's wife, of which she wanted to know more. For very shame or pride—the two, so verbally opposed, are often really identical

—she could not go back to the subject she had so unmistakably snuffed out, while he, in his confessed and genuine dislike of preaching, was equally unlikely to approach it again.

But he had said that, though he disliked preaching, he loved practice, and she had just leaned forward over the dinner-table where they still sat, her pride in her pocket, to ask a question about this, when an interruption came. One of the nurses entered.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," she said; "I thought Lord Thurso was here."

"He will be back soon," said Maud. "Can I do anything?"

"I think Dr. Symes ought to be sent for at once, my lady," she said. "Sandie Mackenzie had very high fever an hour ago, but I didn't like his looks, and I have just taken his temperature again. It is below normal, and that is the worst that can happen, suddenly like this. Dr. Symes told me to send for him if there was a change

for the worse, and I thought I had better come and tell his lordship."

Maud got up.

"You did quite right to come and tell us, nurse," she said. "I will have him sent for at once. Is it very serious?"

"Yes, my lady; it means perforation," she said. "I don't know that it is any good to send for the doctor, but one must do what one can."

Maud nodded.

"Thank you," she said; "I will see to it."

The nurse left the room, going back to her patients; but Maud stood there for a moment without moving, for all she had mused about by the river yesterday came back to her mind in spate, vividly, instantaneously. Only yesterday she had heard Mr. Cochrane tell Duncan that his wife was better, and though that morning she had been ill almost beyond hope of recovery, yet all that day, and all to-day, she had been mending

swiftly and steadily. Thurso was upstairs, too; the opportunity she had desired was completely given her.

She had started to go to ring the bell, and order someone to go down to Dr. Symes's house and summon him, but half-way she stopped. It seemed almost as if Mr. Cochrane had expected this, for he had wheeled round in his chair, and when she stopped he was facing her, quiet, cheerful, looking at her with those strong, childlike eyes.

"Mr. Cochrane," she began.

Their eyes met, and again she felt antagonistic to him. He had the element of certainty about him, which, it seemed to her, no one had the right to carry. But then, his simplicity made it easier to be simple with him. She moved a step nearer him, a step further from the bell.

"I don't know whether I am right to ask you this," she said; "but, to begin with, if what the nurse thinks has happened, it is quite useless, as

she said, to send for the doctor. I don't ask it either in a spirit of derision or curiosity."

"Ask, then," said he quietly.

"Yes; a life is at stake. Can you go to poor Sandie, and make him live? And, if so, will you? I have known him all my life. He has landed a hundred fish for me. But if you say "No," I shall quite understand that you feel—honestly, I am quite sure—that it is not right for you to do so. I shall be sorry, but I shall in no way question your decision. So I ask you: Will you go to Sandie?"

Maud did not know that the human face could hold such happiness as she saw there. He answered at once.

"Why, certainly I will," he said. "But if I am to make him better, you mustn't, while I am treating him, whether you think he is improving or not, send for the doctor. There must be none of that. I will go to him if you wish, but if I go the case is in my hands—no, not that, but under

the direct care of Divine Love. I cannot tell how long it may take to cure him. You know some patients are healed sooner than others, and respond more quickly than others to the healing power. But if you ask me to make him well, believing that I can, I will do so. But you must trust me completely, otherwise you hinder. And you must be sure you are not asking it only to see if I can."

Maud went through a long moment of dreadful indecision. She knew she was taking a tremendous responsibility, for though, if the nurse was right, Sandie was beyond human power, yet it was a serious thing to refuse to send for the doctor. But it was impossible not to trust this strong, happy confidence. And as she hesitated he spoke again, still quite quietly, quite cheerfully.

"Why hesitate?" he said. "Your choice is very simple. You choose the direct power of God to make Sandie well, or you reject it. Don't

think for a moment it is I who make him well. I can do no more than the doctor. Look on me only as the window through which the sun shines. So choose, Lady Maud."

She hesitated no longer.

"Please go to him," she said; "and oh, be quick!"

The human cry sounded there. She was terrified at her choice. What if Sandie died, and she had not sent for the doctor, not done all that could have been done? Yet she did not revoke her decision. But she was frightened, and this stranger whom she had seen yesterday for the first time soothed her like a child.

"There is nothing to be frightened at," he said. "You have chosen right, and your faith knows that, but the flesh is weak. Or, rather, our faith is weak, while our flesh is strong. It binds and controls us sometimes, so that our true will is almost powerless. Let me be silent a minute."

He moved his chair round again to the table where they had dined, made a backward sweep of his hand, overturning and breaking a glass, so as to clear a little space, and leaned his head on his hands, clasping his fingers over his eyes to shut out the sight of all material things, and brought his whole mind home to the one great fact from which sprang his own life, his health, his happiness—namely, his belief in the presence, omnipotence, and love of God. From fishing, from all the preoccupations of life, from Thurso, from Maud, from false beliefs in illness and pain, he called his winged thoughts home, and they settled in his soul like homing doves. With all his power of soul and mind he had to realise the central fact, this root from which the whole world sprang. Every nerve and fibre, material though they were, had to be instinct with it. As he had said to Maud, he was but the window through which the sun shone. This window, then, had to be polished and cleaned, to be made speckless

of dust, or of anything which could cast a shadow and hinder the rays from penetrating. For a minute or two he remained motionless, and then got up from his chair.

"Come up with me, Lady Maud," he said, "since you have asked this in sincerity. I should like you to see it, since you are ready to believe, for, like the Israelites, you shall stand still and see the salvation of God."

Maud did not hesitate now. Something of that which he had realised reached her; the sun streamed in through the window.

"Yes, I will come," she said.

Nurse Miles, who had come down to tell Maud, was busy with patients in another room, and the two, having gone upstairs to the first-floor, inquired of another nurse where Sandie was. She knew Maud, of course, by sight, and supposing that Cochrane was the new doctor expected to-day from Inverness, asked no questions,

but merely took them through the billiard-room, where were some twenty beds, into a smaller room beyond, where Sandie had been placed alone. At the door Mr. Cochrane turned to her.

"Thanks," he said; "I shall not need you."

Then the two entered, and Cochrane closed the door gently behind them.

Maud had never yet in her life seen any to whom the great White Presence has drawn near, but now, when she looked at the bed and the face of the man who lay there, she knew that the supreme moment must nearly have come, so unlike life was what she saw. Sandie, the gillie whom she had known so well, with whom year after year she had passed so many pleasant and windy days on the moor or by the brown sparkling river, was barely recognisable. The grey, pallid mask, with skin drawn tight over the protruding bones of the face, was scarcely human.

Both upper and lower lips, already growing bluish in tinge, were drawn back, so that in both jaws the teeth were exposed even to the gums, and his eyes, wide open and bright and dry, looked piteously this way and that, with pupils dilated with terror, and the soul, frightened at this dark and lonely journey on which none could be its companion, sought for comfort and reassurement, but sought in vain. It was no delirium of fever that caused that active scrutiny: it was fear and dumb appeal. His hands, thin and white, lay outside the blanket, and they, too, were active, picking at it.

Cochrane had seen that before, and knew what it meant, and he quickly pulled a chair to the bedside, leaving Maud standing.

"Sandie," he said, "just listen here a minute. You think you are ill, maybe you think you are dying—at least, your mortal mind tells you that —and you've let yourself believe it. Now, there's

not an atom of truth in it. Why, man, God is looking after you, and He has sent me here this evening to remind you of that. Your forgetting that has made your poor body sick. That's all the trouble."

Maud looked from that mask on the pillow to the man who sat by the bed, and if the one face was dark with the shadow of death that lay over it, the other was so lit and illumined with life that it seemed possible even now that death, for all his grimness and nearness, might have to retreat. Some force, irresistible and radiant, seemed to be challenging him. But as yet she did not dare hope. She could only wait and watch.

Then there was silence. Cochrane took his mind off all else, off poor Sandie even, to abandon himself to the knowledge, the belief in the only Power that healed and lived. Though the evening was cool, the beads of perspiration stood thick on his forehead as he concentrated all his strength,

all his power of belief, into the realisation of this. Then, again, after some quarter of an hour, he raised his head, and looked on the glassy, dying face on the pillow, and spoke more eagerly, more insistently than ever.

"How can you be ill if you only realise that there is nothing real in the world except God's Infinite Love? Fix yourself on that. It's only sin that makes us able to be afraid, or sick, or in pain. But that isn't God's will for you, Sandie, and He won't have it. It's that old cheat, the devil, who makes us sin, and who makes us think we are sick. He tells you, too, that you are a poor sinful body. So you are, but you've forgotten a big thing about that. God has wiped it all away. Jesus took it, the dear Master took all that, and all sickness, too, on His shoulders. It nearly staggered even Him for a moment."

He paused again, and for some minutes more was silent, absorbed in the realisation of that

which he believed. All the time he seemed absolutely unconscious of Maud's presence, and in the silence she looked back from him to that which had been but a death's-head on the pillow, and saw, not exactly to her amazement, but to her intense awe, that a certain change had come over it. It was possible, of course, that her first terrified glance at it had exaggerated the deathliness of it, and that she might in a way have now got used to it. But, in any case, it seemed different. Or, again, the intensity of Mr. Cochrane's belief in the power to heal those on whom the very shadow of death lay might have infected her, and made her see through the medium of his conviction. Yet it seemed to her that a change was there. She faintly recognised Sandie again —the living Sandie whom she knew, not the dead Sandie whom she had seen when she first entered the room. That gaping, mirthless grin had vanished; his lips were no longer drawn back to the base of the teeth. And surely, half an hour

ago, his lips had been nearly blue; now a blood-tinge invaded them again. Also, those poor hands, which had picked and plucked at the blanket, were still. They lay there weak and nerveless, but they no longer picked and clawed. His eyes sought comfort still, but it seemed that they had begun to find it. And was the eclipse, the shadow of death, beginning to pass away from his face? Was the power of Infinite Love, which must be so much stronger than sickness and death, being here and now openly manifested? Or was she but imagining these things in obedience to the suggestion made by that strong, virile mind of the man who sat by the bedside?

From Sandie she looked back to Mr. Cochrane. Soon he raised his eyes again, for through this long silence he had sat with his face buried in his hands; and again he looked at Sandie, and there shone from him a beam so tender and triumphant that his face was transfigured.

"You are better already, my dear man," he

said, "and you are coming back so quickly, retracing your way along the road of error and untruth and unreality. Don't you feel it? Don't you know it?"

There could be no mistake now: Sandie's face had changed. Life, feeble and fluttering, made its impress there; death but flickered where it had dwelt so firmly. A tide had turned. It was low-water still, but the water no longer ebbed; it had begun to flow. And, after a moment, Sandie smiled at those brown, childlike eyes, and the smile was not that fixed and terrified grin which Maud had seen there before.

Cochrane caught, so to speak, and held that look, the first conscious effort of the man who had been dying.

"That's right," he went on; "all that false belief which has made you ill is coming out of your mind. It must come out, all of it. You can't do it of yourself, and I can't do it for you,

but Divine Love can. The door of your heart is opening. Oh, let it swing wide, and let the great sun shine in and chase the shadows away. There, wider yet! Sin is gone, illness is gone; all is gone except the great light. If anyone has told you you were sick, forget it. He was mistaken; he didn't stop to think that there can't be any sickness where God is, and He is everywhere, wherever He is asked to be. We have asked Him to come here, and here He is. Put your hand in His, and let Divine Love lead you, and your sin and your fear and your sickness will just roll away as the mists roll away from the moor, as you have so often seen, when the sun rises. You feel that, Sandie—you know it. Your fear has ceased, for there is nothing to be afraid of. Your sickness and weakness are leaving you, because they were born only from night mists which the sun has scattered. You are tired and weak still—yes, yes—because you have been wading through the slime and choking mud of fear and false belief;

but you are coming out of that, and already God is setting your feet on the rock. You will not be afraid for any terror by night, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness, and all day you are safe, for the arrow that flieth by day cannot touch you, nor the sickness that destroys in the noonday of ignorance and unbelief. God and His salvation are come to you, and you will dwell in His house of defence, set very high. So tell me with your own voice, are you not getting well? Do you not know you are better? Are not the false things vanishing?"

What was happening? Maud asked herself that with thrilled and bewildered wonder. She had to believe the evidence of her own ears, when she heard Sandie saying—faintly, indeed, but audibly, and in his natural voice—that he was better. She had to believe the evidence of her own eyes, which showed her the pallid mask ex-

changed for the face of a living being. He had been pulled back from the gate of death, even as the door was being opened for him to pass through. The colour was coming back to that ghastly clay-hued face; terror and suffering were being expunged from his eyes; the short, panting breath, whistling from between clenched teeth and backdrawn lips, became natural respiration. And from under the bed-clothes there came no longer jumping movements; the limbs lay still.

Yet it was impossible; she could not yet believe the evidence of her own senses. It must be some trick, some illusion. And even as the thought entered her mind, Cochrane, for the first time, turned to her.

"You mustn't doubt either, dear lady," he said, "for you know that all I have been saying is quite true; it is the only thing that is completely true. Come, take all other thought out of your mind. If you have been questioning the truth of what

you see here, reverse that doubt. Tell Sandie that you know God is making him well, just because he is beginning to know that neither illness nor sin nor fear can exist in the presence of Infinite Love. Tell him that."

Maud took a step forward, and stood at the foot of the bed. She had to believe what her eyes showed her, and they showed her no longer that unrecognisable death-mask, but the face of Sandie—thin and pale and tired, it is true, but his living face.

"It is quite true, Sandie," she said. "You are getting well. It is your faith in the Infinite Love that makes you well."

Cochrane turned to the bed again, and spoke in a voice so tender and strong that Maud felt a sudden lump rise in her throat.

"Why, Sandie," he said, "your faith is spreading round you like calm waters, and Infinite Love shines through it like the sun at noonday. Faith

is streaming from you, and the same knowledge streams from us all—Lady Maud and me. And the streams are joining, and rushing in spate together over what was a dry and barren hillside. Listen to the voice of them, shouting their praise to the Lord. By Jove! He is being good to you, isn't He?"

Again he paused a moment.

"And now, since that old cheat, the devil, has been tiring your poor body out, poking it and pinching it and roasting it, you will have a good sleep. Sleep the clock round, Sandie; but before you drop off just be sure you've got tight hold of God's hand, and, like Jacob, say you won't let Him go before He blesses you. And don't let Him go afterwards, either. And when you wake to-morrow squeeze His hand again, and say, 'Divine Love, you're going to lead me now and always.' He will, too. He never said 'No' to anybody, and the biggest trouble He has is that we won't keep on asking Him for what we want.

And now get to sleep, my dear man. Just say to yourself, 'Thou, Lord, art my hope; Thou hast set Thy house of defence very high. There shall no evil happen unto thee. . . .'"

And then, gently as a child's, Sandie's eyelids flickered once and shut down. Cochrane got up without another word, and in silence he and Maud left the room. At the door Maud looked back. Sandie was lying quite still, drawing in the long, full respirations of natural sleep.

Nurse Miles had returned during the last hour to the billiard-room, where she was settling her patients for the night, and as they went through Maud stopped to speak to her.

"Sandie is ever so much better, nurse," she said, "and he has gone to sleep, I think. You won't disturb him again to-night, will you?"

Nurse Miles shook her head.

"It's exhaustion, I'm afraid," she said, "not

sleep. He will not be disturbed till Dr. Symes comes. And I daresay not even then, poor fellow!"

Cochrane was standing by, and it seemed to Maud as if it was her duty to bear witness here and now to what she had seen, to what she incredulously believed.

"There is no need for Dr. Symes to come at all," she said. "I have not sent for him, and shall not. Go and look for yourself, so that I may know you are satisfied."

The nurse stared at her a moment, then went swiftly to the door of the room where Sandie lay, opened it, and passed through. In some half-minute she came out again, closing it softly behind her.

"Why, he's getting some natural sleep," she said, "and he hasn't closed his eyes the last three nights. And his breathing is quiet, and there is no more rigor. Yet his temperature came down

to below normal from high fever an hour ago. Or could I have made a mistake?"

Cochrane smiled at her.

"Yes, nurse; I think there has been a mistake," he said. "But he's all right now, and you are satisfied, are you? Good night. Sandie won't wake for the next twelve hours, I think."

The two went downstairs again. Thurso was still up in his bedroom, and, but that the table had been cleared, the room was just as they had left it an hour ago. But it seemed to Maud as if some huge change had taken place. What it was she could hardly formulate yet; she only knew that the whole aspect and nature of things was different. Then she turned to Cochrane.

"I don't understand," she said; "I am bewildered."

"You understood just now," said he, "when you told Sandie his faith was making him well.

That is all. It's just the truest and simplest and only thing in this world. But I'll get home now, Lady Maud. I've—I've got more to do."

Maud felt fearfully excited. All her emotions, all her beliefs and aspirations, were strung up to their highest by what she had seen. She had seen what she had seen; Nurse Miles had seen too. It was all incredible, but it had happened. She could not call it impossible. And if this had taken place, why should not more?

"Ah, make them all well!" she cried. "Stop this dreadful false belief of suffering and illness, since you say it is false."

"But is it not false?" he asked. "Did it not vanish before the truth?"

"Yes, yes; it must be so!" cried she excitedly. "But can't you get God to make them all know what Sandie knows now?"

He put out his hand to her.

"Don't you think He is doing that?" said he. "You see, there have been no fresh cases now for

two days, and all the cases are doing well, I believe—now."

"Then, is it stopping?" she asked.

Those serene childlike eyes smiled at her.

"Why, yes," he said. "Good night, Lady Maud."

CHAPTER IV.

It was mid-June, but no Londoner of any intelligence could possibly have guessed it, because, instead of the temperature being absolutely Arctic, it was extremely warm—a condition of things which in England we are not accustomed to associate with the midsummer months. Middlesex, we must suppose, had somehow come into conjunction with the Dog-star, who had bent his beneficent rays onto the county, and given birth to a whole week-long litter of delicious dog-days. It was really hot; there was really a sun, a big, blazing, golden sun, instead of the lemon-coloured plate which in general shines so very feebly and remotely through the fog and dark mists of Thames-side, and this was not only delightful in

itself, but it actually made the shade a delightful thing to get into. The tops of omnibuses were thick with folk, and the Londoner of even the parks and palaces left the black silk tube, with which he is accustomed to roast and destroy his few remaining hairs, at home, and wore a straw hat instead, even when he went out, as he usually did, to lunch—and didn't care. Indeed, there was no reason why he should, since only the obviously insane wore top-hats in such weather, and insanity was surely a more serious defect to have on the head than straw. A thin blue haze hung over distances. Piccadilly, a hundred yards away, had a bloom upon it like the dust on a ripe plum, and horses (those intelligent animals) had followed the lead of their masters, and wore straw hats too, with rims coquettishly raised at the sides to allow plenty of ear-play. Sarsaparilla was on tap out of large yellow barrels, and the irresponsible happiness which only fine weather or a consciousness of virtue so pronounced as to be priggish

can give, flooded the town like the sunshine itself. It may still be a question whether it is happiness that makes people good, or virtue that makes people happy, but there can be no doubt at all that beautiful weather makes us all somewhat kinder and more charitably disposed than we are wont to be in March, and also immensely happy, so that the Zadkiel of spiritual almanacs will probably be right in prophesying the coincidence of the millennium with real midsummer weather.

The haze of heat which made a plum of Piccadilly, which the progressive London County Council, after their affectionate visit to the broad boulevards of Paris, had, at enormous expense, widened by at least six inches, dealt still more magically, having more suitable material to work upon, with the Green Park, as seen from the windows of Thurso House, and with Thurso House as seen

from the Green Park. For it was a great square Italian palace, which looked as if it had been taken straight from the Grand Canal at Venice, and its stately white walls of Portland stone, with its long rows of tall windows, wore an air of extraordinary distinction among its squat or gawky neighbours. The entrance to it, faced by a deep covered porch, supported on Roman-Corinthian pillars, was in Arlington Street, while towards the Park it was faced by a broad stone terrace, from which two curved staircases went down into the small formal Italian garden, screened from the Park itself by a hedge of tall lilacs. Thus, though it stood in the very centre of the beating heart of London, it was admirably quiet, and the bustle and hum of the streets came muffled to it, not causing disturbance and distraction, but rather stimulating to activity by its persistent though gentle reminder that the world was very busy indeed.

The dining-room was at the back of the

house, and opened onto the broad terrace that ran the whole length of the building, and to-day the row of its eight huge windows was thrown wide, so that the lace curtains that prevented the Park lounger from looking in, but allowed the diner to look out, swayed and bulged and were withdrawn in the hot summer breeze that came like breaking waves against them, while the bourdon note of the busy town came in like the hum of great bees burrowing into golden flowers. Listening, you could divide the noise up into its component parts. The sound of human voices was there, and the tread of feet, the clip-clop of single horses, the tattoo of the hoofs of pairs, and the throb and rattle of machine-driven vehicles; but the ear receiving it without poised attention knew only that many busy lives were active, and many wheels rolling.

The room itself was parquetted with oak and walnut, and the floor, as befitted the heat and the season, was left bare, except for some half-

dozen of silk Persian rugs that made shimmering islands on the sea of its shining surface. The wall which faced the Park was, indeed, rather window than wall, and was unadorned but for the brocaded curtains which were looped back from the windows; but the other three walls glowed with the presentments of bygone Raynhams. The first Lord Thurso was there, and his son, the first Earl, a portrait in peer's robes by Reynolds, who had also painted the superb picture of his wife, and the great family group of them, with their two sons and a daughter, which hung over the Italian chimney-piece. The second Earl was there, too, the eldest boy in the family group, grown to man's estate, and painted by Gainsborough. The picture of his wife was a Romney, with the red jewelled shadows of that master, while Lawrence was the artist for the next generation. Then, after a gap, bridged over in part by the elder Richmond, came the present Thurso and his wife, two brilliant and startling canvases,

claiming kinship by right of their exquisite art with the earlier masters.

In other respects—for nothing could spoil these glorious decorations or the more smouldering brilliance of the painted ceiling—the room did not at this moment appear at the level of its best possibilities, for the floor was "star-scattered" with a multitude of small round tables in preparation for the supper of the ball that was to take place that night; while at the end, in front of the chimney-piece, was a long, narrow table, laid on one side only, for the very elect. Though numerous, they were to be very elect indeed, and whole constellations of stars and yards of garters would not find a place there to-night, but shine at the small round tables. In any case, however, so Catherine Thurso had arranged, everybody was going to have proper things to eat and drink, which should be presented to her guests' notice in decent fashion. There was to be no buffet-supper for the mere rank and file, where, as at

the refreshment-room of a railway-station, her friends would scramble for sandwiches and pale yellow drinks, with mint and anise and cummin floating about in them, among footmen who jogged their elbows with plates of strawberries, while the elect, Olympian-wise, refreshed themselves behind closed doors. To-night, in fact, Thurso House was to be reopened with a due regard for its stateliness and the huge hospitality that it ought to exercise after a period of ten lean years, so to speak, in which the late lord had lived alone here, with half the rooms closed, a secret and eccentric life. He had not even been wicked and held infamous revel, which would have been picturesque and full of colour; but he had only been morose, and shut himself up; miserly, and had not entertained anybody; gouty, and devoted to port. He had died just a year ago, and to-night the house was going to be launched again, after its period of dry-dock. Lady Thurso would almost have liked to rechristen it

too. It was associated in her mind and in the mind of everybody else with such a very disagreeable old gentleman.

Lady Thurso, during these ten lean years, in which she and her husband had "pigged it," as she expressed it, in a poky little house in Grosvenor Square, owing to the tightness of the purse-strings, had laid very solid foundations for the position she meant to occupy when she should be installed here. She fully intended to be magnificent, and to fill the place of mistress of this house in a manner worthy of it. But no one had a greater contempt than she for the modern hostess, who makes use of her time and money and position only to give enormous caravanserai entertainments, and to spend the rest of her days in going to similar functions provided by her friends. Such methods were futile: they never led to anything worth doing, while those who

thought that by lavish entertainment they could get, socially speaking, anywhere that was worth getting to, made an even greater error. She had seen during these last ten years the incessant invasion of London by those whose sole invasive power was money and the willingness to spend it to any extent in order to be considered what is called "smart." And she entirely disagreed with those ignorant and old-fashioned moralists who shook their heads and lifted up their voices in lamentations over the capitulation of London to the almighty dollar. London—all London that was worth anything, that is to say—had not, with all due deference to the loud crowings from Farm Street, capitulated in the very least to the almighty dollar, and those—there were many of them—who imagined that they were making a great splash in the world, and were becoming of social importance, merely because they were rich and willing to spend their money on bands and prima-donnas and ortolans, made a mistake almost

pathetic in its ineptitude. Such folk never got anywhere really. They never became *intime* with the society they coveted, however many weird parties they gave, where one met the latest African explorer, or looked at magic-lantern slides of the bacillus of cholera, or turned out all the lights and observed the antics of radium, or listened (this was rather popular this year, for everybody was bent on improving his mind) to short lectures on the ideals of England or the remoteness of the stars. The poor dears thought they were laying the foundation of what they considered "smartness," whereas they were only turning their houses into free restaurants, where the world, with the merest commonsense, went to be fed, if it had nothing better to do. There were, of course, others who had some further capacity than that of mere spending—people who were witty, agreeable, and with the power to charm. Certainly, their wealth helped such of them as desired, for some inexplicable reason, to

have the details of their parties in the *Morning Post;* but it was not their wealth that gave them success, but their wit. As if anybody of sense cared whether the latest sensation of the music-halls came and did conjuring tricks or not, or whether they ate cold beef or picked and pecked through a two-hour dinner! What made going out to dinner pleasant was the intercourse with pleasant people, not the screeching of an operatic tenor or performing dogs. Of course, many people would go anywhere in order to be fed, if the food was decent; but then they "wiped their mouths and went their journey," leaving the poor self-deceived hostess to think that she was going hand over hand up the social ladder.

Catherine Thurso, being half American by birth, was a compatriot of many of these, and her short, perfectly modelled nose went instinctively into the air when she thought of them. In London, she was sure, you could not become of any importance merely by spending money, though

many people thought you could, and, indeed, thought they had. In New York, it is true, such a thing was not only possible, but easy, for there, so it seemed to her, the standard of social success was the preposterous character of your extravagance. But those who thought that the same recipe was good in London were wanting in the sense of moral geography. Wealth in London brought to your house shoals of the Hon. Mrs. Not-quite-in-it, second-rate pianists, and the crowd of everybody else who wanted to get on. Or if you flew a little higher in the way of intelligence, you could get harmless little connoisseurs who were full of second-rate information about the world in general and their own branch of art, who picked up mouldy Correggios and doubtful Stradivariuses. The cream of the second-rate could be skimmed by the wealthy, but unless they were something more, they got no higher than that. Your wealth could give you that and publicity, and the fatal error these pathetic

climbers fell into lay in thinking that publicity meant celebrity, and that the fact that you had "been seen in the Park, looking charming," meant anything at all. Her "ten lean years" had certainly not been spent in these futile strivings.

At this moment she was sitting with Jim Raynham, her husband's younger brother, and Ruby Majendie—who, she hoped, would soon persuade Jim to marry her, for the sake of the happiness of them both—having lunch at one of those little round tables in the dining-room, in order to direct the decoration of the room for the supper this evening. Time, as usual, was precious with her to-day, and the minutes in which it was necessary to sit at a table and eat could thus be used. She had just given orders that all the hydrangeas, pale pink and pale blue, of which a perfect copse had been made at the far end of the room, should be taken away again, for really the Italian fireplace was much more decorative.

"Besides, hydrangeas always remind me of Mr. James Turner," she said in parenthesis.

"And who is he?" asked Jim.

"He isn't he—he's it. It's a little art gentleman, plump, like a bullfinch, with a little grey moustache. You must know him, because, when one lunches or dines out, he is invariably there, and he is invariably the one person whom one can't remember. Hydrangeas remind me of him, because he looks as if he had been grown in a pot in a moderately warm greenhouse. He is like a hydrangea beginning to get stout, just as those dreadful shrubs are. He always opens conversation by saying that I cut him the other day in Bond Street. I explain that I didn't see him, which is quite true. I never can see him."

The florist had removed all the hydrangeas except a small group that screened the centre of the grate. These were the "choicest," and he waited for further orders.

"No, take them all away," called out Lady Thurso. "All, every one. Isn't it so, Ruby?"

Ruby put her head on one side and looked.

"Yes, quite right," she said. "I wish you wouldn't always be right. Nobody else would have thought of having nothing there."

"Because people don't see the value of empty places," said she. "They want to fill everything up—the walls, the fireplaces, the hours, everything. Oh, think of the unemployed! How nice it sounds! One works and subscribes and does all kinds of things for them, but if only they would be as kind, and work for the employed, so that they might be unemployed! Fancy having time to do nothing at all! That is the condition which I envy, though, of course, if it were offered me, like so many things I envy, I would not accept it, because it would mean parting with my individuality. But I would really give any sum to be able to buy a couple of hours this afternoon."

"What for?"

"Why, to be unemployed. I want to sit in a chair and doze if I like. No, I think that would be waste; but for two hours to feel that I had nothing whatever to do. Who was it—Queen Elizabeth, I think—who said she wanted to be a milkmaid? Don't you understand? I understand that enormously. I would even be a hydrangea, and stand in a pot, or be Mr. James Turner in his curator's room, with nothing to do until it is closing time. Instead, I am supposed to belong to the leisured classes, and never have a moment. No ferns, either," she called to the florist—"nothing at all."

A footman was markedly waiting at her elbow to get in a word edgeways.

"The carriage is round, my lady," he said.

Lady Thurso hastily finished an egg in aspic, with which she had begun lunch.

"For me?" she said.

"Yes, my lady. It was ordered for a quarter-past two."

Lady Thurso pressed her fingers against her eyelids for a moment.

"I can't remember," she said. "Go to my room quickly, and bring me a large blue engagement-book—the one with 'Where am I?' written on it. And bring me anything—cold mutton or bread and cheese."

She turned to Ruby.

"And I am so hungry!" she cried. "And it is exceedingly likely I shall have to fly off without any lunch. Oh, if I were only unemployed for two hours, I should spend one in eating! Besides, I had no breakfast, and is one egg in aspic sufficient for an active female until tea-time?"

Ruby laughed.

"It wouldn't be for this one," she said. "But why no breakfast? Is that a new plan?"

"New? No; it's as old as the hills, for that delightful old Professor, the one like a pink bear

at the British Museum, told me the other day——"

"Is he a hydrangea, too?" asked Jim.

"Not at all. When one goes out to lunch, he is the one person in the room whom everybody knows. Don't interrupt. He told me that the ancient Egyptians never had any breakfast, because the word for breakfast is the same as afternoon, or something of the sort—and think how marvellous they were! I've been an ancient Egyptian for nearly a fortnight."

"But they never had motor-cars," said Jim. "It may have been that."

"Oh, how flippant! How could we ever get anywhere without them, considering how frequently we don't, even with them? Ah, now for the book!"

Catherine turned hurriedly over the pages of "Where am I?" and found where she was. She breathed a sigh of relief as she closed it again.

"Thank Heaven!" she said, "because otherwise I really shouldn't have tasted food since yesterday until tea-time. Send the carriage back, please. It's only the bazaar at St. Ursula's, and I told them I almost certainly couldn't go. Besides, the Princess is opening it, so I needn't. I should only have to stand up and curtsey, and agree that the day is vile."

"It isn't," said Jim.

"I know; but one can't argue. Oh, the carriage must come back in twenty minutes," she added to the footman.

Jim helped himself largely to the next course.

"Catherine, that is the first time you have ever disappointed me," he said. "I thought you would always rather go somewhere and do something than sit down and be comfortable. I thought you never even wanted to be unemployed."

"I don't really," said she. "I only think I do."

"But, anyhow, you prefer to have lunch than go to St. Ursula's."

"Ah, you don't understand! I have got to be at the Industrial Sale at three, in order to open it myself, and I literally haven't enough minutes to get down to St. Ursula's, and stand and grin, and get back to Portland Place by three. It couldn't happen. My anxiety was that the quarter-past two engagement might leave me time, if I had no lunch, to get to Portland Place at three. It won't. Hurrah!"

Lady Thurso poured herself out a glass of very hot water from a blanketed jug that stood at her elbow, and drank it in rapid sips. She never took alcohol in any form, except on those rare occasions when she was really dead beat, and had to do something energetic the next moment. But since every fad appealed to her, she, Athenian-wise, in her desire for some new thing, tried them all. She had just abandoned, in fact, the plan of drinking nothing whatever at meals, but sipping

distilled water at eleven in the morning and half-past three in the afternoon. It seemed to suit her quite well, but as she was, and had always been, in perfect health already, there was nothing particular to be gained by it, whereas for other reasons the *régime* was inconvenient, since at those hours when she ought to be sipping distilled water she was usually very busy, and either forgot, or, as at a bazaar, was so placed that distilled water was practically unattainable. So, just for the moment, she drank hot water at meals, and found it suited her as well as everything else.

"Good gracious, what nonsense people talk," she said, "when they speak of the idle and luxurious upper classes! Look at us all. From the King downwards, we are worked to death for the sake of the classes who revile us. I stopped in the Park the other day to listen to one of those unwashed orators of the Marble Arch. He read out from a grimy newspaper that the King had been shooting somewhere, and was to return next day

'in a motor-car,' said the speaker, with unspeakable irony, and there were groans. Oh, how I longed to speak, too—but I hadn't time—and remind them that he did a far longer day's work than any two of them put together, and would come up in a motor-car because otherwise he couldn't open the new wing of the Ophthalmic Hospital next morning. But that is just the weak point about Socialism. I am a Socialist until I hear them talk. Good gracious, how I should welcome an Eight-Hours Bill! It would be a holiday! Eight hours! Lazy brutes!"

Lady Thurso paused for a moment to eat the slice of cold mutton which she had ordered. Having been a disciple of Dr. Haig for several months in the past year, she had veered round, and now ate hardly anything but meat and pulses. She felt magnificently well.

"Not long ago, too, I saw an article in some Socialistic paper," she said, "which struck me as exceedingly forcible, and I wrote to the author,

asking him to come and see me at ten one morning, and booked the engagement when I heard from him. I was interested in what he said; I wanted to know what he went on. He came on the morning in question, but at half-past ten, and what was the reason, do you think? Because he had only just got up! He told me so himself. But I was anxious to do him justice, and said I supposed he had gone to bed very late the night before. Not at all; he had been in bed by twelve. And there was I, who had not gone to bed till four, expecting and waiting for this bedridden creature! And he had written about the indolence of me! Ah, that week I had felt strong Socialistic leanings, but he cured me at once. Thurso was so funny, too. He shuffled—you know Thurso's shuffle of disapproval—when I told him about it. Why shouldn't I have seen the man? I was interested, until I saw him, anyhow."

Jim considered this. He was not a person of

action, but liked inquiring into motive. It was this that made Catherine almost despair of getting him to marry Ruby; he could easily spend so many years in theoretical study of the advantages and drawbacks of matrimony.

"Is that sufficient?" he asked. "May one do anything that one finds interesting?"

"Certainly, if it doesn't injure anybody. The first rule of life is to give other people a good time if you can; the second is not to hurt them under any pretext; and the third to enjoy yourself in every other way. That is why I adore what Thurso calls "quackery" of all kinds. I love discovering the secret of life which solves everything for about ten minutes. I have—what did the pink bear say?—oh yes: the most insatiable appetite for novelties. Wasn't it darling of him? It keeps one busy, and that, after all, is the true elixir of life. I should be miserable if I hadn't got more to do than I can possibly manage."

"But just now you said you would give any-

thing for a couple of unemployed hours this afternoon," said Ruby.

"I know, because the flesh was weak, and I was very hungry and dog-tired. I feel better now —nearly ready to begin again."

Ruby turned her pale Botticelli face towards her.

"How you can go on, I don't know," she said. "You play all the time we play, and work all the time we rest. You make me feel lazy too, which I resent."

"Darling, I will make you feel industrious this afternoon," said Catherine, "because I want you and Jim to stop here, and criticise and alter and direct till the ballroom and this room and the staircase are all absolutely perfect. You know what I want done: I want you to see that it is done. Don't judge by daylight only. Have the blinds and curtains drawn, and see that it looks right by electric light. I shall not be able to get

home till just before dinner, and then it will be too late. English decorators are hopeless; they know as much about decoration as I know about the lunar theory. I wonder they haven't sent some plush monkeys climbing up into spiders' webs to hang in the windows."

"They sent hundreds of yellow calceolarias," said Ruby, "which is about as bad. I sent them all back. And poor Mr. Hopkinson didn't seem to know what wild-flowers were, when I told him you wanted wild-flowers all up the staircase."

"He knows now," remarked Lady Thurso.

It was probable that poor Mr. Hopkinson did "know now," for ever since morning tall flowering grasses, meadow-sweet, cornflowers, cistus, ox-eye daisies, tendrils of wild-rose, clumps of buttercups, and all the myriad herbage of rural June, had been poured into the house, and the staircase, with great boughs of hawthorn and rose overhanging the lowlier growths, was like an apotheosised

lane lying between ribands of shaded hayfield. Lady Thurso, inheriting the American love of doing something which has never been done before, a thing which leads to failure in a dozen cases, and hits the bull's-eye on the lacky thirteenth, had never been better inspired, and the staircase, a rather heavy and not very admirable feature in the house, had been gloriously transformed by the lightness and spring of this feathery decoration. But poor Mr. Hopkinson's ignorance of what wild-flowers were had been capped by his ignorance of how wild-flowers grew, and the original order to decorate the stairs with only wild-flowers had led to his placing the poor dears in neat and orderly rows, as in a riband bed. Consequently, he and his assistant florists had, about twelve-thirty that morning, to demolish and begin all over again, having first, under Lady Thurso's supervision, "made a salad" of all these fragrant hampers of flowers and grasses, and then stuck them "properly"—that is to say, absolutely at

random—into the trays of moist clay and troughs of water that lined each side of the staircase, which would keep them alive and bright-eyed till morning.

There was still five minutes before the carriage came, and Lady Thurso, "while the bread was yet in her mouth," hurried out to see if Mr. Hopkinson had at length grasped the nature of her scheme. It appeared that he had. The staircase was a country lane, just as she had visualised it. And, somehow, with the adaptability that was as natural to her as is the sympathetic change of colour in a chameleon, as she stood below a clump of flowering hawthorn, she looked, for all her air of the world and patrician aspect, like some exquisite milkmaid, the embodiment of Queen Elizabeth's ideal. But the milkmaid had the critical eye, and she looked very slowly and carefully up and down this vista of the hayfields.

She examined and re-examined.

"More buttercups in that corner," she said—"all in a clump like sunlight—and another big bough of hawthorn—two boughs. Not twigs like that, just buttonholes, but boughs."

She waited, sitting on the top step with Ruby, till this was done; then eagerly, but carefully, she looked at it again with her eyes half shut.

"I *think* it will do," she said, "but please have all the curtains drawn, dear Ruby, and look at it by electric light. I'm not sure there is enough yellow even yet. I hope it won't give Thurso hay-fever, for he and I will be planted here till the royal quadrille begins. He and Maud get here this afternoon."

"And the typhoid?" asked Ruby.

"For the last week there has been no further case," she said, "and everybody is getting better. No deaths for the last week, either. It looks as if it is all over. I was quite wrong, it seems, about the need of Thurso's going there. It seems that he was of the utmost use in making the

people obey doctors' orders. I had not thought of that; it was stupid of me."

This was completely characteristic of her. If she were wrong, she owned up at once. It spared one the degradation of arguing against one's convictions.

"But I hope he will stop in town for the rest of the season," she went on. "People already think it is odd of him to be in Scotland now; and though it matters very little what people think, it is much better that they should not think at all."

"And Maud?" asked Ruby.

"It is from her I had all this news, though I have been writing—type-writing, I should say—to Thurso. Maud was interesting. She told me about a Mr. Cochrane, to whom Thurso let the fishing. He is a Christian Scientist, which sounds silly, but Maud says she saw him cure a bad case. She writes quite gravely, too, as if she really be-

lieved it, and she is not fanciful. I think I shall study Christian Science next August."

"Why August?"

"Because I sha'n't have any time in July. Oh yes, and Maud did not know that the fishing was let—so like Thurso not to tell her—and was caught by Mr. Cochrane poaching in his river. He wasn't annoyed, it appears, though it certainly ought to have been annoying. Do you think I shall never be annoyed any more if I study Christian Science all August?"

"Oh, conceal your want of annoyance, then," said Ruby, "and in any case don't get the Christian Science smile. It wouldn't suit you, and it is particularly fatiguing for others. Alice Yardly has it. That is why I can't look at her any more."

Lady Thurso was still not quite satisfied with her staircase, or, at any rate, she wanted to be sure that she was.

"Still more buttercups," she proclaimed. "A hundred—two hands full of them."

Then she detached herself again completely, and turned to Ruby.

"Oh, you must be just, Ruby," she said. "Alice was always fatiguing, whether she smiled or not, and she is not really more fatiguing now than she used to be. Maud loves her, and so do I, and we both yawn our heads off when she is with us. It is true that she now seems to smile with a purpose, but if we didn't know she was a Christian what's-his-name, we shouldn't notice the change. Her plan is to be helpful now, but she is just as helpless as ever, so it doesn't matter. Of course, nobody can really help anybody else. We all have to help ourselves."

"Then, why do you spend your life——" began Ruby.

"In bazaars and industries, you mean. I hardly know. I daresay you think it is insincere —that I ought to sell the diamond palisade and

the ruby plaster, or induce Thurso to do so. But I am sincere. I want to live a gorgeous life, and I will. At the same time, I am delighted to work while you rest, as you said, if my work will make some poor wretches in Caithness a little less uncomfortable. If I didn't, I should lie awake at night, thinking about them. That would be uncomfortable for me, too, so you are quite at liberty to suppose that it is all selfishness—refined selfishness, if you like, which is the worst sort. Certainly, if I wasn't a very hard-working woman, which I am, I should have bad dreams by day, as well as no sleep at night."

Again she paused.

"And I've been talking about myself," she said, "which you will allow is unusual. And the carriage is here, and I must go. Ruby, you see the idea of the corner, don't you? It must be sunlight—sunlight of buttercups, bless them! Oh, to be a milkmaid, now that June is here! But otherwise don't let them touch the staircase any

more. It is so nearly what I meant it to be that it is safer not to run any risks. It is darling of you to stop and superintend these stupid people. And please, if they bring any gardenia or tuberose, make them take it away, like the calceolarias. Gardenias are so 'powerful.' What a heavenly expression! I am sure it was invented at Clapham. The same people say 'carriage sweep' and 'soiled handkerchiefs.' I hate the middle classes!"

Lady Thurso would probably have been much surprised if she had been told that she was a genius, because she had a dim idea that, in order to be, or, rather, have been, a genius, it was necessary to live a sordid and unsuccessful life, and to die prematurely and unnoticed in a garret. But if the stock definition of genius was at all correct, she had a very reasonable claim to the title, for her power of taking pains bordered on the infinite. It made no matter to her on what

she was engaged. Whatever she did, she approached her task with the transcendent aim for perfection, and whether it was the decoration of her staircase, or the speech that she had to make at the Industrial Sale, she bestowed on it the utmost effort of which she was capable. Another gift crowned this, which, though almost as rare, is not less remunerative; for when her utmost pains had been bestowed, she could dismiss the subject from her mind, and not worry about it any more. Thus now, the moment she had left her door, the staircase decoration ceased to exist for her. She had done her best, and her connection with it was severed. The speech, too, that she would have to make in a quarter of an hour was non-existent also, since this morning she had thought it over till she knew no more to think, had written it down, and had said it aloud to herself until she was perfectly satisfied that she knew what she wanted to say, and could say it.

This being so, she abandoned herself to the

joy of looking about her—a fascinating pursuit, if one looks with intelligence. It was she, in fact, who was the author of a word that had gone round London—namely, that by driving for an hour at the right time and through the right streets you could, without exchanging a word with anybody, know all that the morning papers had contained of importance, and predict all that would be in the evening sheets. In the course of such a drive you could see the leader of what had been the Opposition and was now the Government stepping into a hansom, with a face elate but anxious, at his door in Grosvenor Square. The hansom argued a sudden emergency. There was no luggage, and the probable goal was Buckingham Palace. Who, then, was the new Prime Minister? Again, in Chesham Place you could see the Russian Ambassador getting into his motor, with luggage piled on the top. Clearly, then, he was going out of town, and an amelioration in Russian affairs might reasonably be argued,

since it was impossible that he should leave if the crisis were as critical as it had been yesterday. Or, again, the blinds were down where A was very ill, the blinds were still up where B was yesterday supposed to be critically ill after an operation. Therefore, A had thought worse of it, and died; B had thought better of it, and still lived. Then there was a block at Hyde Park Corner, and the royal liveries flashed by. The new Prime Minister would only just get to Buckingham Palace first.

But much as she observed, it was probable that, as far as observation went, she was more the victim than the priest, for in all the little London world which is called the great there was no one at this moment quite so important as she. She "mattered"—a thing of rare occurrence in so republican a place—and she mattered publicly, openly, superbly. In the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of London life, in which nothing, neither beauty nor blood nor wit, nor any pre-eminence, carries

with it any certain distinction, she was just now the centre of the whole astounding mixture of sordidness and brilliance, of intelligence and stupidity. To-morrow or next year, as she knew quite well, it might be a music-hall artist, or a foreign king, or a twopenny philosopher, or an infant prince, or somebody who played tunes on his front teeth, who would absorb general attention, but just now it was she. She rated "general attention" at about its proper value, knowing quite well that the affection of one friend was worth all the general attention of a century; but she found that it was, as she expressed it, "rather fun."

The movements and conjunction of these stars and planets of London life are far more inscrutable than the vagaries of the simpler constellations of the heaven, but just at this moment Catherine Thurso was the central sun round which all else revolved. There were twenty other people who had wealth, beauty, and charm in no less degree than she, though in the matter of beauty forty-

nine Parises out of fifty would have awarded the golden apple to this Juno among women, and the world, for that reason or another, had chosen her to be their temporary idol. She was the person who mattered, and this was her hour. And her hour, no less than her own enjoyment of it, she used, as Thurso had said, magnificently, for it really seemed as if charity, no less than social entertainment, would collapse without her support. She made herself a slave to any scheme that helped the helpless, or encouraged the would-be worker to work, and yet all the time she lived, and intended to live, gorgeously. So, like the driver of a pair of horses, she did not suffer the social horse to be lazy or shirk its work, for she knew (and acted on the knowledge) that her social distinction brought buyers to her bazaars. She played, therefore, the brilliant woman of the world for all it was worth, in order to assist deserving objects, though she enjoyed the *rôle* enormously for its own sake. Both horses, charitable and

social, felt her indefatigable lash, and she spurred herself on, just as she spurred on all those who surrounded her, inducing activity in them by the spectacle of her own glorious vitality.

Anyone as radically efficient as Catherine Thurso undoubtedly was has to march through life with as few impedimenta as possible, and all emotional baggage which is not likely to be needed must be firmly left behind. She had long ago realised this, and had always acted on it, so that now it was more from force of habit than by any conscious effort that she eliminated from her mind any emotion on its first appearance if it was likely to clog or hinder her energies. Worry, sorrow, regret for all that was past or irremediable, she simply threw away as one throws the envelopes of opened letters into the waste-paper basket. They were of no earthly use; they but made an unprofitable litter if they were allowed to lie about, nor did you want the drawers and compartments in your brain crammed

with rubbish like this. Thus, it was but very seldom that she let her thoughts dwell on the one great thing that she had missed all her life. She had never loved. Her marriage with Thurso had, as the Press most truly announced, "been arranged," and she had fallen in with this arrangement. Even as a girl she had wanted the sort of position and opportunity that such a marriage gave her, and she had made, certainly outwardly, and to a very considerable extent inwardly, the most splendid success of it. She had done her duty, too, as a wife in giving him three sons, and had filled her place superbly. But love had never really come to her. That, by no fault of hers, had apparently been left out of her emotional equipment, and since she was convinced that this omission was not her fault, and that it was out of her power to remedy it, she did not worry about it. But to-day, though she did not worry, she could not help wondering about a certain time now long past in her life, since it was

conceivable that certain things which as yet belonged only to time long past would begin to be factors in her life in the immediate future. So now that the question of the staircase and the coming speech at the Industrial Sale were off her mind, these things occupied her somewhat insistently. There was no mystery about it all, and nothing whatever to fear either in the past or the future; but certain possibilities interested her.

Count Villars had just arrived in England, having at an extraordinarily early age—for he could be scarcely forty yet—been appointed Hungarian Ambassador to the Court of St. James; and there were quite a number of people resident in that parish who remembered very distinctly how desperately he had fallen in love with Catherine Thurso twelve years ago, when she had first come out, and, as her mother expressed it, taken "the shine" out of the rest of the girls of the year. Then, so the world still remembered,

rather perplexing events had happened in rapid succession. Her engagement to young Villars had been actually supposed to have taken place, but hardly had that become news when it was contradicted, and Villars, then a junior secretary in the Embassy of which he was now the head, had been transferred elsewhere; while before the season was over Catherine Etheridge's engagement to her present husband was formally announced, and was followed before the end of the year by her marriage. For Mrs. Etheridge had always meant that her daughter should marry Lord Raynham, as he then was; and if anybody thought that her plans were going to be interfered with by any volcanic young Austrian, however brilliant and handsome, without a penny of his own, and removed by half a dozen lives from the succession to the huge estates of Villars (those lives certainly made a lot of difference), she would show him his mistake. There were, in fact, many who thought that Mrs. Etheridge's plans were going to

be interfered with; but their mistake had been duly demonstrated to them when Catherine Etheridge so soon after became Catherine Raynham.

Rudolf Villars, in this long interval of twelve years between his abrupt departure and his return to England, had done everything except marry, and in all that he did Fortune had declared herself to be his parent. His really brilliant gifts had reaped their reward before he was too old to care about success, relations neither near nor dear had died, and he was now next in succession to the estates of Villars—with only a decrepit old great-uncle between him and them—and Ambassador to the English Court. To the world at large this situation, which just now was being rather largely discussed, had elements of interest. It was known that Catherine Thurso and her husband were not romantically attached to each other; it was conjectured that, since Rudolf Vil-

lars had remained single, he was still romantically attached to her, and it was impossible to help wondering whether at last she would show signs of being attached to anybody. To the world she was, in spite of her beauty, her charm, her brilliance, a somewhat irritating enigma. All the glory of her belonged to nobody. She did not care for her husband, which was a pity, but what made it worse was that she did not care for anybody else. And so many men had been wildly devoted to her, and of them all not one had met with a single particle of success, or, to do her justice, of encouragement, for she had nothing in common with the flirt. She was not in the least shocked, either, at their protestations. If she had been, her attitude would, at any rate, have been a moral and an intelligible one. But she merely laughed at them, and told them not to be absurd. If they persisted, she yawned. She forgot all about it, too, a week afterwards, even if she had been made to yawn very much, asked

them to the house as usual, and was specially friendly.

Catherine Thurso, as will have been gathered, did her duty with exemplary fullness in the state of life to which her mother, in the main, had called her. As soon as she married she grasped the idea of life that her position entailed, if she was to fill it adequately and with any credit to herself; welcomed the prospect almost with rapture; and, with all the splendid energies of her mind and body, lived up to a really high ideal of it. Her time, her talents, and her money were always at the service of any scheme which she believed to be one that merited support, and she brought to her task not the sense of duty only, but a most warm-hearted kindliness. An unsupported sense of duty alone is a barren road to tread, but her genuine kindliness, her real interest in those who were in need, made it break out for her into flowers. She truly cared for the

causes at which she so slaved; she wanted everybody to enjoy himself. But this warmth, this amiability, which pervaded her nature was both the strongest and the highest motive she knew. She did everything warmly, but nothing passionately, because it seemed as if passion had been left out of her nature. Yet sometimes, as on this afternoon, when the factors for years long past were coming up above the horizon again, she wondered whether that was quite strictly the case. It was years, certainly, since any hint or suggestion of it had come near her, but she remembered now that unquiet and perplexity, half bliss, half unhappiness, which she had known in those few weeks, and which had culminated in her half promise (it had not been more than that) to marry Rudolf Villars. Whatever that feeling was, it had been a bud only, something unopened, and had never expanded into a flower, for swift maternal hands had, without any figure of speech, nipped it off. She had been called a sentimental

schoolgirl with such extraordinary assurance and acidity that she had felt that it must be the case.

But to-day, when she knew that this evening the man who had roused in her the sentimentality at any rate of a schoolgirl would, after this long lapse of years, come to her house again, she wondered (though this was useless emotional baggage) if she would feel anything that would show her that he had once been different to all others. She had not seen him since. Probably he was rather bald, rather stout, rather of the diplomatist type, which seemed to her often to be slightly tinged with pomposity. Very likely, when his name was announced, she would see a total stranger, shake hands with a stranger. She almost hoped that this would prove to be so.

Yes; she did not want to feel again anything which resembled the memory of that bewildering unrest, which, considering how long ago it all was, was so strangely vivid still. Her life was very

full, she enjoyed it enormously; she was happy, she was nearly content, and she did not, as far as she knew herself, wish to risk agitation and upheaval in order to experience a new emotion. She had seen love, at the most, like distant lightning winking on the horizon; she did not want the thunderstorm to come any nearer. She wished it would go away.

Yet, yet . . . even now, in the midsummer and zenith of her life, she sometimes asked herself, "Is this all?" And then, if she allowed herself to think further, it seemed to her a sorry comedy never to feel more acutely than she felt, never to be more absorbed, more eager, than this. Frankly, she did not believe in God, in any huge central force that was utterly good; and, that being denied her, she felt sometimes that it would have been something to believe in the devil. But she had never seen any reason to believe in him either. She had never been tempted to be wicked, as those

moralists would say who believed in the devil. She was a woman healthy both in mind and body, with countless opportunities for doing good, of which she availed herself nobly, not because she believed in God, but because she was of a most kindly nature; and she was not what is called wicked, because she did not care sufficiently. Morality, perhaps it would be right to say, had no existence for her, and she was absolutely moral in thought and action because she had no real temptation to be otherwise. To her, as a married woman, it seemed also rather bad form to have a lover; it was not dignified. You had to play a mean part. But she realised that if only she had ever really cared for any of those men who certainly had "cared" for her, no moral code would have stood in her way for a moment. Simply she did not want, and she wondered whether the failure to want was strength or weakness.

The Industrial Sale went off with the success

that always attended any scheme that she took up, and an hour after she had opened it most of the stalls were nearly empty, though the prices charged and paid for the objects sold were of the most fancy order. She herself had sold stockings, nothing but stockings, and all male London, it appeared, had been in dire want of stockings. They had been frightfully expensive, but the sense of her own cheapness in charging so much was counteracted by the knowledge of the good cause. Irish peasants had made them, and she willingly lent her place and position in order that Irish peasants might reap the benefits of what was adventitiously hers. She was sorry for people who had to live like that; she willingly gave her time, her energy, even her sense of "cheapness," to help them.

But even before her stall was empty she had seen somebody in the crowd whom, though she had not seen him for so long, she recognised instantaneously. He was neither bald nor stout,

nor did he look pompous. He was as she remembered him. And, again, though it had not come any nearer yet, the distant lightning flickered on the horizon.

Apparently, though he had only arrived in England two or three days ago, he had still more than two or three friends here, and for half an hour after she had seen him first he was occupied with hand-shakes and recognitions. Then, after her stall, which had been so besieged by purchasers, was bare, he passed and caught her eye.

"Ah, Lady Thurso," he said, in that accurate foreign accent which she found now that she remembered so well, "a thousand greetings! I tried to get near your stall, but it was impossible. And I never waste time over the impossible. But now you have nothing that I can buy, so I, as a purchaser, am impossible too."

"Yes, I have sold everything," she said. "You are too late."

She, who was generally so apt of speech, so quick to take up a point, or drop it for another, felt suddenly tongue-tied. She could think of nothing more to say, though, indeed, as she thought impatiently to herself, it was his turn. She had spoken last. For, as she stood there looking at him, finding him so utterly unchanged, in one moment twelve years had been softly sponged off her life, and some thrill, some nameless bitter-sweet agitation, flickered through her. She was no stranger to that feeling; she had felt it before. But for the moment, infinitesimal in duration, it tied her tongue. It was like some tune that we have heard in childhood, and suddenly hear again, so that we must pause and say to ourselves, "What is that?"

Then she partly recovered herself. If he would not speak, she must.

"Being late is almost a crime in a diplomatist," she said. "You should always be a little earlier than other people."

Then she pulled herself together, determining on her attitude towards him, and smiled.

"And your Excellency is going to honour my little dance this evening, are you not?" she said.

A faint smile answered hers, quivering for a moment on his clean-shaven mouth and being reflected in his dark eyes. "Your Excellency" was a delicious phrase, considering the last phrase before to-day that he had heard from that mouth. She—a woman's privilege—had made a map, so to speak, of their future relations, colouring its boundaries as suited her. It amused him to pretend that he recognised the validity of them.

"I have already accepted your ladyship's very kind invitation," he said.

CHAPTER V.

THE epidemic of typhoid up at Achnaleesh, which had begun so suddenly and violently, had ceased with the same suddenness, and from the first day that no fresh case was reported no fresh case occurred at all. There was every reason to be satisfied with this vanishing trick of the germ, though the manner of its vanishing was as inexplicable as its appearance. Typhoid, in other words, had appeared without the source of infection being traced, and had disappeared again with the same mysteriousness. It had gone like one of Thurso's headaches, as if the tap had been turned off, and after the ball he had shown no sign that he thought he ought to go back North again. This quite fell in with his wife's wishes,

which she had not thought good to express to him, for she desired for many reasons that he should be here in London with her for awhile, and the principal of these had been that she was aware that people were "wondering" about herself and Villars. Though there was nothing to wonder about, she still preferred that people should not do so, and Thurso's presence would act as a sort of extinguisher to these guttering flames. The memory of the world, she knew, was in general very short. The events of one week are quite sufficient to put out of its head anything that may or may not have occurred the week before; but when it does happen really to have got tight hold of something, whether true or imaginary, its memory has the tiresome tenaciousness of a child's. You may change the subject, point out of the window, rattle with toys, or expose bright objects to view, but the world, like a child, though it may give a distracted attention to these lures for a moment or two, soon gets

a glassy eye again, and repeats, "But what about——" The world was doing just that now, and she felt that Thurso's presence gave a better chance of solid distraction than any bright objects that she could dangle before it.

The ball, for instance, had been an object positively dazzling in its brightness, and though it differed in kind even from other functions which the outside observer might think to be similar, she wanted more than that, though the hugeness of its success could not fail to gratify even one who was so accustomed to succeed. Other functions might have all London assembled in no less beautiful a house, dancing to the identical band, with everybody in tiaras and garters; but it was quite obvious to those who knew that Lady Thurso had hit the very top note that time, the note that is only struck once in a season. What the top note was it was impossible to say, just as it is impossible to say why the same ingredients can make two perfectly dif-

ferent puddings, except that in both cases it depends on the cook. The same people probably had been to twenty other balls, and danced to the same music, and said the same things, but inscrutably, though certainly, it was *the* ball of the year, and competition was futile. That new feature—the staircase of wild-flowers—might have had something infinitesimal to do with it; that glorious dining-room, not turned upside down and smothered in flowers, might have helped, for the chic of not decorating a room at all, but letting it remain as it appeared when nothing was going on, so that apparently you could have this kind of entertainment without fuss or preparation of any kind, was undeniable. Yet, again, nobody could turn her staircase into a country lane without thought. So the upshot was that Lady Thurso alone knew exactly how to do it: what to keep unadorned, as if she was going to dine alone; what to decorate, and how to decorate it; what to say, how to look, what to wear. She looked,

it may be remarked, magnificent, and wore no jewels at all. Nobody hitherto had thought of that. All her guests outshone her, and she outshone them all. That, perhaps, was a vibration in the top note, which in any case was as clear as a musical glass.

But much as the ball was talked about, she knew that Rudolf Villars and she were talked about more. Wherever people met together during the subsequent week—and just at this time of the year there was nowhere that they did not meet—the ball had to be mentioned, but like a corollary came the question, "Is he still devoted to her?" And the number of comments on that, the interpretations, the conjectures, the inferences, would have made any of those myriad women whose ideal is to be talked about in that kind of way satisfied to live or die happily ever afterwards. Unfortunately, Catherine Thurso did not claim kinship with such. It gave her not the smallest pleasure to know that a situation (or want of it)

that concerned her should be the one thing that everybody else discussed as if it concerned them. Had she, when she met Villars again at the bazaar, only felt, "Can it be he? I should never have known him," she would not have troubled her head about what anybody else might be saying. But she had not enjoyed that dispassionate attitude. Instead, something within her, independent of her own control, had said "Rudolf," just as she had said it twelve years ago. Twelve years ago the volume of her emotional chronicles had been closed with a snap. Now that ambiguous book was reopened again on the very page at which it had been cut short. The vague girlish excitement, trouble and joy was presented to her notice again; but now it was presented, not in that dim light, but in the blaze and illumination of her womanhood. Passion had not been awake in her then, the potential fire still smouldered under the damped coals of immaturity; but now those had passed

away, a fire was ready to spring up, a fire of retarded dawn, with the splendour of noonday waiting on it. Was it really so? Already she feared to ask herself that question, for fear of the answer to it.

The pretence of playing at being strangers, when at the bazaar she had called him "Your Excellency," had broken down with singular completeness. That very night at her house he had established a footing of old friendship, to which, in bare justice, he was perfectly entitled. She could not defend herself against that, she could not resent it, even if she had wished to do so. Years ago he had loved her, and had asked her to marry him, and if that does not entitle a man to take the attitude of an old friend, when next relations of any sort are resumed, there is nothing in the world that does. Also—and this was no minor point—she had half accepted him, and then thrown him over. Neither by look nor word did he appear to cast that up against her now, and

she could not, in response to his generosity, deny him the standing of a friend.

Yet though he had but claimed, tacitly, but by a right that she could not dispute, the privilege of friendship, she knew that he implied much more. She knew quite well that he still loved her. There was no question about it in her mind, and it disquieted her. But the love of other men had not disturbed the serenity of her own *insouciance,* and the fact that this man did told her that he was not as others.

It was characteristic of her and of the worldly wisdom with which she always ordered her life that she crammed into the week that followed her ball engagements which would ordinarily have taken even her ten days to get through. She had seen at once that a question of some importance would some time have to be answered, and having made up her mind what her answer would be, she also made it impossible for herself, as far as was in her power, to leave herself leisure for re-

considering it. She had, as has been said, no real moral code to refer it to. She had been born, as we must suppose many people are, without a moral sense, and her upbringing and environment had not generated it. She did not, for instance, refrain from stealing owing to the wickedness of so doing, but merely because it was mean and nasty, like going about with dirty gloves. And as regards other points, no sense of morality dictated her decision now. To put it baldly and blankly, as she did to herself, here was a man who had loved her twelve years ago, and, she felt certain, still loved her; while she, on her side, was stirred again as she was stirred twelve years ago. Only now she was Thurso's wife.

Worldly wisdom, however, said much more than this to her. Her first impulse to treat him with formality was clearly mistaken. If she did not treat him with the friendliness that was so undoubtedly his due, the world would certainly say that she was cold to him in public only to be

warm in private; and from the point of view of the world, the conclusion, though actually false, would surely be accredited. Obviously, the proper attitude, since he desired to be treated as a friend, was to do so. It was here that Thurso's presence in London was desirable. The whole affair was delicate, and if he was somewhere in Caithness, where there might be typhoid or there might not, it gave the gossips far more excuse for raging furiously together. There was no doubt that she would see a good deal of Rudolf Villars during this month or two of London; her husband should, therefore, see a good deal of him too.

She had a charming place on the Thames, just below Maidenhead, left her by her mother, a low, rambling, creeper-covered house, with one foot in the river, one in the garden. Here she often entertained from Saturday till Monday, not with any mistaken notion that it was a rest, after the bustle and fatigue of London, to get into the

tranquillity of Thames-side, but in order to bustle more than ever. London, it was true, was sufficiently busy, but in London one was not in evidence, anyhow, until eleven or so in the morning; and while in London, also, even if there were people in the house, they looked after themselves, and need only be given their beds and their food. But at Bray the bustle began earlier, since, as this was the country, everyone thought it necessary to play a round of golf, or row wildly on the Thames, before the day began at all; while nobody ever went to bed till nearly morning, since in the country nobody need get up. Thurso and Maud were going to motor down with her on Saturday afternoon, but as Maud had not appeared at the time appointed, it was to be taken for granted that she was doing other things, and would find her way down on her own account. Catherine, on the other hand, like most busy people, was punctual to the minute.

"Well, she's not here," she said, as she stepped

into the car, "and, really, we can't wait, Thurso. Unless we start now, people will get there before we do, and that is never considered quite polite."

"No, it's as well to be in one's house if one has asked people to stay in it," he remarked, "though they probably get on beautifully without one."

He got in after her, but stood for a moment with his hand on the door, as if wanting to give Maud another minute. Her eye happened to fall on it, and she saw it was trembling. The next moment he sat down, caught her eye, and looked away again, flushing a little. There was something aimlessly furtive about all this which was unlike him. But all this week she had been a little uneasy about him; he had seemed nervous, easily startled, uncertain of himself. And as they started, though caresses were not frequent between them, she laid her ungloved hand on his.

"Thurso, old boy," she said, "are you well? There is nothing the matter with you?"

He started at her touch, and withdrew his hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but your rings are so cold. Yes, I am perfectly well. I don't know why you ask."

"Because you don't look very well," she said. "Maud told me you had had several very bad headaches up in the North."

"I had; but this is rather ancient history, is it not? It has not occurred to you to inquire about them during the last ten days."

"Maud only told me this morning," she said.

"I have had no return of them since I came to town."

The footman had got up by the chauffeur, and the big Napier car bubbled and whirred to itself a moment, and then slid noiselessly off, with rapid but smooth acceleration of its pace, over the dry street. It was checked for a moment at

the corner into Piccadilly, poised like a hovering hawk, and then glided into the street. The roadway was very full, but, dancing elastically on its springs, it flicked in and out of the congested traffic with the precision of a fish steering its way between clumps of waving water-weed. It seemed, indeed, more like a sentient animal, a fine-mouthed horse, or some trained setter, than a machine, or as if intelligence and discernment, a brain that thought and calculated and obeyed, lived in that long painted bonnet, rather than merely pistons and cylinders and all the crack-named apparatus of its mechanism. It slackened its speed before one would have thought that any block in the traffic ahead was discernible, as if scenting the need from far off; it cut in and out of moving cabs and omnibuses, as if possessed of occult knowledge with regard to the pace they were going, and what lay invisible ahead of them; it foresaw impediments to its free movement that seemed as if they could not be foreseen, and con-

jectured openings that appeared inconjecturable. But all down Piccadilly, all down Knightsbridge, Thurso seemed unaccountably nervous. He could hardly sit still, but kept shifting and fidgeting in his seat, frowning and starting and grasping the side of the car, and once even calling out to the chauffeur, who, in fact, was one in a thousand for combined carefulness and speed, bidding him go more quietly through the jostle of traffic. This, again, was quite unlike him, though like what he had been for the last ten days, and his wife, seeming not to watch, watched him narrowly, but without comment. But when it came to his calling a warning to the inimitable Marcel, who would sooner have flayed all the skin off his own hands than let another vehicle scrape one grain of paint off the splash-board of his beloved car, she could not help protesting. Besides, it looked so silly to jump about like that.

"Dear Thurso," she said, "what is the matter? He is driving perfectly carefully."

Thurso frowned, still looking anxiously at the road in front, and spoke with unveiled irritation.

"He is driving recklessly, it seems to me," he said. "As if it mattered whether we saved five minutes on the road. But women are never content till they've had some smash. That was simply the result of wanting to get in front of a cab now, instead of waiting two seconds."

This, again, was quite unlike him. His tone and his words distinctly lacked courtesy, and "Hamlet" without the Prince was not less like the play than was Thurso when he forgot his manners like her husband. She was always ready to account for any failing, whether of omission or commission, by physical causes, and Thurso's rudeness she unhesitatingly put down to his not feeling well. But in that case it would surely be better both for him and her if he did not continue a mode of progression that made him jumpy.

"If you are nervous," she said, "let us cross the Park, and put you down at Paddington. You can take the train."

"That is absurd," he said shortly.

They went on in silence for a little, and Thurso made an immense effort to pull himself together, or, at any rate, the effort seemed to him to be immense. But he knew that lately the effort to do anything he did not feel inclined to do had been enormously increased. Those moments of quickened consciousness which were his seemed to make his brain in the intervals more lethargic, less able to give orders. He knew quite well that his nerves were out of order, and though it was true that, since coming to town, as he had just told his wife, he had had no return of his neuralgia, he had for the last ten days always silenced its threatenings, sometimes even before such threatening was really perceptible, by a liberal use of that divine drug which never failed. He believed, too, if he thought about it,

that he was taking larger doses than those prescribed, and knew that he was intentionally absent-minded when he poured out his draught. Nor had he taken it only for anodynic purposes; more than once or twice—he could not say how many times, but certainly less than fifty—he had taken it for the pure pleasure of its effects. He knew he had begun to be dragged into the habit, as a man whose clothes are caught between revolving cogwheels is dragged in, unless by a superhuman effort he can break loose. It was not that he did not struggle against it, but he struggled with mental reservations. Two days ago, for instance, he had resolved not to touch it for forty-eight hours, promising himself, as a reward for his abstinence, a pleasant hour or two when he got down to Bray. After that, so he had planned, he would continue to break free from it by a carefully graduated course. His next treat should be three days afterwards; after that there should be abstention for four days.

For he was rather frightened already at his previous indulgence, and at the greed with which he longed for it. During the last week in Scotland he had taken it every day, and sometimes twice. Sometimes he said to himself that it suited him. Perhaps he was abnormal, but it made him feel so well, so alive. Then, again, he would recognise the danger that lay in front of him, and vowed to set about the task of breaking from the habit. But it must be done by degrees; he already could make no larger resolve than that. But that he did resolve. The interval between his treats should become longer and longer, until he craved no more. Craved! How he craved now! It was that which made him so nervous and irritable. But he must have that one full dose when he got down to Bray. He had promised himself that, and he felt as if it were almost a duty to perform that promise.

Meantime, whatever in his brain was lethargic and inert, some sense of cunning and precaution

was always strong, and he knew that it was most important that Catherine should not think that there was anything wrong. So before the pause after his last rather snappish reply had made it impossible to refer back, he spoke again in a different tone.

"You must forgive me for speaking rudely just now," he said, "and I am sure that Marcel is really careful. But I had the most dreadfully trying time up in Scotland, and those horrible headaches did not make things easier. As a matter of fact, I saw Dr. Symes when I was there, and he told me I was on edge. But he did not attach the least importance to it. He said the best thing I could do was to come down here and amuse myself, and forget all about the typhoid."

That, again, was true as far as it went, but no further. Dr. Symes had said these things with regard to his neuralgia: he had not pronounced on the cure for it.

"But there's no harm in seeing a doctor," she said, "and telling him all you feel and all you do. Then he tells you to avoid curried prawns, and you pay only two guineas."

He laughed.

"I have better uses for even so small a sum," he said, while his mind said to itself: "Two guineas' worth of laudanum! Two guineas' worth of laudanum!"

"But it's so much better to be told if there's anything wrong," she said, "and so nice to be told that there isn't."

"But I am sure of that, without being told," said he.

The house at Bray was long and low and rambling, straggling down at one point to the very edge of the river, but for the most part standing in the middle of flower-beds and short-turfed lawn and stiff yew-hedges cut into fantastic shapes, which screened the customs of its inhabitants from the population in boats, so that the

Sunday afternoon crowd could not, as in most of the river-side houses, see exactly who was there, what they had for tea, who smoked and slept, who read, and who played croquet. Indeed, had it not been for this impenetrable barrier of thick-set foliage, what they had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner would have been equally public property; for Lady Thurso had built a big open pavilion on the terrace just above the river, where, when the day was hot, her party took all their meals. Another pavilion nearer the house served as a drawing-room, card-room, or smoking-room, and on a fine Sunday nobody more than set foot in the house itself from breakfast till bed-time. A dozen guests or so were all that the house would hold, but if, as often happened, people proposed themselves when the sleeping accommodation was already commanded, it was possible to get beds for them at a neighbouring hotel. To-day, however, there was to be no sleeping out; it was doubtful, indeed, whether the house itself would be full.

Maud was certainly coming; Count Villars, Alice Yardly, and her husband, were also certainties, as were Jim Raynham and Ruby Majendie, who had proposed to each other—Lady Thurso never could find out who "began"—on the night of her ball; and a couple of American cousins brought their number up to ten.

Catherine hardly knew whether or no she was glad that she had so small a party. For once, it is true, she would have a fairly quiet Sunday; but, worried as she was, not only about this private emotional history of her own, but also (though she told herself this was causeless) about her husband, she was not sure whether it would not have been a greater rest to have plenty of superficial arrangements to make, and plenty of people who did not touch her inner life to amuse. She did not at all believe in thinking about things unless some practical step was to be the outcome of thought, in which case you got an instant dividend for your investment; but if thought was to end in nothing,

your dividend was composed of worry only. However, even with these few people in the house, she could manage to keep herself fairly well occupied. The American cousins, too, a plain and elderly millionaire, very dyspeptic and intensely mournful, with his wife, who was young, voluble, and carried about with her pails, as it were, of gross and fulsome flattery, with which she industriously daubed everybody who was in the least worth daubing, would certainly want—especially in view of Thurso's irritability—a little careful management. She almost wished she had not invited them, but she inherited from her mother that idea of American hospitality which makes all other hospitality appear niggardly in comparison, and did not consider she had done her duty by even the most undesirable cousins if she only asked them to dinner. "Cousins must be asked to stay, even if crossing-sweepers," was the line on which she went. These particular cousins, she acknowledged to herself, were

rather trying, but she acknowledged it to nobody else.

In spite of the desirability of arriving before your guests, Silas P. Morton and Theodosia, whom her husband always addressed in full as "Theodosia," giving each syllable its due value, had arrived before them, and met them hospitably at the front-door.

"Why, if this doesn't tickle me to death!" exclaimed Theodosia, "to receive you at your own house, Catherine! And how are you, Lord Thurso?"

Thurso stifled a wish that something would tickle Theodosia to death, and she proceeded.

"My! what a beautiful motor! Why, if it isn't cunning! Silas and I got here just half an hour ago, and your servants brought us tea right away out on the lawn, and made us ever so much at home. But, as I'm for ever saying to everybody, 'Catherine is just perfect, and everything

she has is just perfect—her husband, her servants, her motor-car, and her crackers.' You should have seen Silas tackle the crackers! Don't I tell everybody so, Silas?"

When Theodosia was present there was never any fear of awkward silences—awkward speeches were the only possibilities; but she covered up every awkward speech so quickly with another that none of them mattered much. She was usually talking when somebody else was talking, and always when nobody else was.

"Don't you tell everybody what, Theodosia?" inquired her husband.

"Why, that Catherine is just perfect. But Englishmen are so perfect, too, that I guess it's right for perfect American girls to marry them. Why, your ball the other night! I thought I knew something about balls, but Catherine's ahead of me there, though we've had some bright evenings in New York. I guess you're proud of your

wife, Lord Thurso, and I guess she's proud of you."

This was all very pleasant, and it was not only a salute-explosion of geniality on the part of Theodosia; she exploded all the time like a quick-firing gun. She was never sick or sorry, or tired or silent; she was always bright, and a contemplative mind might seriously wonder whether anything known to occur in this uncertain world would make her stop talking. She talked all the time that she was in a dentist's chair, even though her speech was impeded by pads and gags and creosote; and she had once talked without intermission through a railway accident, not even stopping to scream. At intervals the voice of her husband said "Theodosia!" like a clock striking, but the ticking went on all the same.

"And if that isn't the cunningest yew-hedge I ever saw," she said, "with a door cut right through the middle of it as if it was a wall; and there's the river just beyond with the boats, like people

on the side-walk. Lord Thurso, can you see the river from where you are sitting? Silas, change places with Lord Thurso, because I want him to see the river through the door in the yew-hedge. My! look at that bug—what do you call it? Oh yes, butterfly—sitting right here on the arm of my chair! Isn't it tame! The bugs in America aren't half so tame as that: they hustle more; but I think it's English not to hustle so much. You eat your tea without hustling, too, Lord Thurso. I call that the true British tranquillity, and I just adore it. Don't I, Silas?"

Catherine, however, distinctly hustled over her tea, and got up. It was she who had asked Theodosia here, and she did not for a moment repent having done so; but she began to foresee that it would be necessary to provide Theodosia with relays of companions who should take her for a series of walks, and "rides" in the punt (as Theodosia would say), and other rides in motors, if she wanted to save her Saturday to Monday

from utter shipwreck. She thanked Heaven Maud was coming, who handled loquacious people so serenely, and listened, or appeared to, to their impossible conversation with an interest that was quite marvellous. Clearly, also, it was by a direct dispensation of Providence that Alice Yardly was to be of this party, for Alice also asked for nothing more than to be allowed to talk without intermission. Theodosia talked of things she saw—the river, the road, the bug, the yew-hedge; her eyes supplied unfailing topics of conversation to her tongue. While Alice talked with the same incessantness of things you could not see—faith and healing, and false claims of mortal mind. Between them they would cover the whole ground. And both of them were perfectly happy sitting opposite anybody else who might talk simultaneously, as long as he asked no question which interrupted the flow of their volubility. Clearly, then, Providence intended that Alice and Theodosia should be paired, like blessed sirens, and keep up a per-

petual flow of conversation to which nobody else need listen.

But at present Maud had not arrived, so she took Theodosia down to the river, and "punted her around," as that lady's phrase went. Catherine punted around, so she felt, as she had never punted before; she would have punted to Oxford, if necessary, to keep this appreciative lady away from the house till Maud or Alice Yardly arrived, either of whom were capable of tackling her. Protective instincts governed those unusual physical activities. She was responsible for the advent of Theodosia; she was therefore responsible for keeping Theodosia away from Thurso.

So it was not till seven had clanged from the church tower at Maidenhead that she turned the punt homewards, and found on arrival that everybody had come, and that everybody had gone to dress. She herself was a dresser of abnormal quickness, and found she had still nearly half an hour to spare after she had seen Theodosia safely

to her room. So, instead of wasting it alone, she went to talk to Maud. The latter was betwixt and between, with a hovering maid, and a river of hair making Pactolus down her back. The highest geniality flowed on the other side.

"Dearest Catherine," she said, "I know it was too awful of me, but, of course, you didn't wait. Everything has been late to-day—at least, I have —and I was late for lunch, and things were amusing, and as I had told my maid to take my traps, and other people were going down to Taplow, I came down with them, and was dropped here. Isn't the country looking too divine! Of course, Thurso came with you. We broke down —you never heard such a bang—and serve me right. Do stop and talk to me for five minutes, because I know you dress like summer lightning. How many maids surround you? Three, is it? What fun it was all last week! You do give your relations and connections a good time. Please wear your smartest to-night—jewels and all. It

is so chic to be smart in the country and shabby in London. And it's an old-established custom for you to smoke a cigarette while I am dressing, before it's time for you to dress. There's half an hour yet."

Catherine lit a cigarette, and, catching Maud's eye, nodded in the direction of her maid and spoke in French.

"Send her away for a few minutes," she said.

Maud gave a giggle of laughter.

"What a bad language to choose," she said, "because Hortense is French—aren't you, Hortense? Will you go away, please, and come back when her ladyship goes away?"

Then Maud turned to her sister-in-law.

"Now, Catherine, what is it?" she asked.

"Well, first, do be very kind to me, Maud, and take Theodosia away on all possible occasions, so that she gets on Thurso's nerves as little as may be."

Maud brought a long plait of hair round her shoulder and held it in her mouth for a moment.

"Then I know what you want to talk about," she said. "Theodosia first: I'm on; and afterwards?"

"Of course you know. Thurso's nerves. He was fearfully jumpy all the way down. He made efforts, but you don't have to make efforts if you are well, do you? He was rather rude, too, which is so unlike him. He is not rude when he is well. You told me he had bad attacks of neuralgia up in Scotland."

"Yes, day after day," said Maud.

She paused a moment, wondering whether she had better say that which was on the tip of her tongue. Then she decided to do so. After all, it was her brother's wife to whom she was talking, and the matter was one that clearly concerned her. Even more than that, she was talking to Catherine, to whose wisdom, above that of, per-

haps, all others, she felt it natural to confide perplexity or trouble.

"He had got to get through the day's work," she said, "and to enable him to do so, to get relief from this horrible pain, he took laudanum, which had been prescribed for him, rather freely. I allow that before the end I was more anxious about that than about his neuralgia. I think he ought to get the limits laid down by a doctor. It can't be right for anybody to take that sort of drug absolutely at his own discretion."

"Ah! but his headaches have ceased," said Catherine. "He told me there had been no return of them since he came to town."

"I am very glad," said Maud, "because—well, it can't be a good thing to get in the habit of taking that stuff, though while he was up in Scotland and the neuralgia was so bad he had to get relief somehow. But if his headaches have ceased, I suppose one need not be anxious any more."

Catherine heard a certain hesitation in her voice, and saw the same in her face.

"You are not telling me quite all," she said. "I think you had better. You are afraid of something more. If your fears are groundless, there is no harm done; if they have foundation, it is best for me to know. Of course I guess what it is."

Maud put down her brush, and turned to her sister-in-law.

"Yes; I expect you guess quite correctly. It is this: He has begun to take it for its own sake —for the sake of its effects. Coming up in the train he thought I was asleep, and I saw him—yes, I spied on him if you like—I saw him go to his bag, take out the bottle, and have a dose. He had no headache; he was never better. He wanted the effects of it. It was a big dose, too —double the ordinary one, I should say. He did not measure it. I think he did the same thing up in Scotland."

Catherine got up, and looked out of the window in silence for awhile.

"You did perfectly right to tell me, Maud. Thank you," she said. "But it is hell—damnation, you know. What do you advise?"

"Get him to see a doctor."

"He won't. I suggested it to-day. And one doesn't want to lose any time; the pace accelerates so quickly on that awful road. Poor Thurso! Of course it is desirable that I should appear to find out what you have told me for myself—find out, that is to say, that he is taking this drug."

"You may say I told you, if necessary," said Maud. "What are you going to do?"

"I can't make any plan yet. I must see."

Catherine left the room, and went down the passage to her own. Outside her husband's dressing-room, next hers, was standing his valet, and a sudden thought occurred to her.

"Is his lordship dressed, do you know?" she asked.

"No, my lady. His lordship told me he would call me when he began," said the man.

She went to the door, tapped, and entered.

"Flynn told me you were not dressing yet," she said, "though both you and I will be late if we don't begin."

"I waited till I heard you come to your room," he said. "What is it?"

"Only I am afraid you must take in Alice Yardly and have Theodosia next you. I am sorry: it is the upper and nether millstones. But we'll change about to-morrow."

Thurso was lying on his sofa, doing nothing, and with no book or paper near him; nor did he look as if he had been sleeping. His eyes were bright and alert. He looked radiantly happy and cheerful; it was not the same man who had frowned and started all the way down in the car.

"Why should we change about to-morrow?" he said. "I delight in Theodosia and I adore Alice. Her extraordinary silliness makes me feel

wise in my own conceit, and conceited in my own wisdom. Is it really dressing-time? How tiresome! Don't let us dine till nine to-morrow. It is absurd dining before in the summer. One oughtn't to lose a minute of this heavenly twilight hour by doing anything in it."

Catherine had walked to the open window by which his sofa was drawn up; and was observing him closely. He stretched himself with the luxuriousness of some basking animal as he spoke, and she saw he had a cigarette in each hand, both of which were burning.

"Is that a new plan?" she said, "smoking two cigarettes at once?"

"Yes, so far as I am concerned; but it's not original. Don't you remember the Pirate King in 'Peter Pan' smokes two—or was it three?—cigars together, because he is such an astounding swell? My God! what a play! It put the clock back thirty years. The moral is that you can't have too much of a good thing. You should lay your

pleasures on thick, not thin; butter your cake on both sides, and put jam on the top. I am awfully happy to-night. It was an excellent idea of yours to come down here. How wonderful the light is! how good everything smells!"

He was speaking with a sort of purr of sensuous enjoyment, though the words were clear and unblurred. She had seen him like this once before, when in the spring he had sought relief from an attack of pain with laudanum. She thought then that it was the mere cessation of it which caused that ecstasy; now she knew what it was, and her heart sank.

His long, lazy stretch turned him a little on the sofa, so that he faced her as she stood by the window, with the rosy evening light flooding her face.

"And, my God! how beautiful you are, Catherine!" he said. "You are made for worship and immortality. There never was a woman so wonderful as you."

Catherine pulled herself together, called up her courage. Something must be done.

"Thurso, let us leave my charms for a moment," she said. "Tell me, have you had any headache to-day? I hope not."

"Headache! No. I've forgotten what headaches are like."

"Then, why have you been taking that stuff —laudanum, opium, whatever it is? Oh, it's so dangerous!"

"I—I haven't. What do you mean?" he said, stumbling over the words.

She caught sight of a small medicine-glass on his washing-stand, and took it up and smelled it.

"Where is the use of saying that?" she asked, holding it out to him.

He got up quickly, ashamed for a moment of having lied to her, but more ashamed of his stupidity in not being more careful; but when she came in he was so uplifted and vivified by the

drug that he had been off his guard. But his shame was infinitesimal compared to his anger with her. She had spoiled, smashed up all his happiness by her interference. Instead of that wonderful sense of well-being and complete physical and mental contentment, he felt now only furiously angry with her. What right had she to break in upon him like this, making him lie to her, which he hated, and making his lie instantly detected?

"And where is the use of your interfering like this?" he cried. "You have spoiled it all now: you have robbed me of it, and it was mine! It would serve you right if I took another dose now, straight away, and did not come down. You know nothing at all about it. I was an absolute martyr to that neuralgia up in Scotland, and I began—yes, I did begin—to get into the habit of taking this. But I am breaking myself of it; you didn't know that. Till this evening I had not taken any for two days, and after that I was not going to take any more for three days, and after

that not for four. You seem to think.... I don't know what you think."

She felt at that moment more tenderly towards him than she had felt for years. His weakness—his voluble, incoherent weakness—his childish excuses, touched her. There was something almost woundingly pathetic, too, in his graduated resolves, as if a habit could be cured that way. His anger roused no resentment in her, and she spoke appealingly, full of pity.

"Oh, Thurso, you don't know what a dangerous thing you are doing," she said—"indeed, you don't. The very fact that you do it makes you unable to see what you do. Be a man, and don't think about two days, or three days, or four days, but stop it now at once. The longer it goes on, the more difficult it will be to break it. Give me the bottle, or whatever it is, like a good fellow, and let me throw it away. You will be glad you have done so every day of your life afterwards. Please, I entreat you."

His anger died out as she spoke, for the effect of the drug was still on him, enhancing his enjoyment of the light and the country fragrance, and enhancing the glory of her superb beauty as she pleaded with him. She had not resented the angry things he had said to her: that was fine of her, and fine she always was, and she was not contemptuous of the lie he had babbled and stuttered over. She seemed not to remember it, and that was generous. Above all, his craving for the drug was satisfied for the moment, and, so he added somewhere very secretly, he could always get some more. Nor was his will yet entirely enslaved, and all his best self told him that she was right beyond any question or possibility of argument.

He hesitated only a moment, then unlocked his despatch-box and took out a half-empty bottle. The sight of it made his desire flicker into flame again; but, after all, he had fully intended to take no more for three days. Then he

swept that away also. His will for the time was set on breaking the habit now and at once. He held it out to her.

"Yes; you are right," he said. "Here it is. Don't despise me if you can help it, Cathy."

The use of the shortened name touched her, too.

"Oh, my dear, don't talk of that," she said; "and thank you most awfully, Thurso. You will never regret this."

She went to the window and poured the brown fluid out among the leaves of the creepers, with a little shudder at the stale, sickly smell of it. Then she flung the bottle into the shrubbery.

"I ought to thank you," he said; "and I do."

The evening was extraordinarily warm and windless, and though they had dinner in the open pavilion in the garden, Mr. Silas P. Morton only sent for the second thickest of his black-and-

white plaids to put round his venerable shoulders as a precaution against chills, and after dinner a bridge-table was started for the occupation of the Americans and Jim and Ruby, while the others preferred for the present to wander about in the deepening dusk. The light still lingered in the west and beneath it the steely grey of the river smouldered with the reflected sunshine that the sky still retained. Moths hovered over the huddled fragrance of the dim garden-beds, emerging every now and then from the darkness into the bright light cast by the lamps in the pavilion where the little party had dined, and the veiled odours of night began to steal onto the air—the odours of tobacco-plant and night-stocks, of dewy foliage, ripe hayfields, and damp earth, which are so far more delicate and suggestive than the trumpet-blown fragrance of the day. Though crimson still lingered in the west, overhead the steel-blue of night was darkening fast, and minute stars were beginning to be lit. From the rest

of the world the colour had already faded: it was an etching, a marvellous mezzotint of black-and-white.

Catherine, when they rose from the table, found Villars by her side, in a manner that irresistibly implied that he meant to have a stroll with her, and leaving the others—Maud had already towed Alice Yardly out of Thurso's immediate neighbourhood, and was listening to a fearfully interminable account of Mrs. Eddy's relation to Phineas P. Quimby—they went down through the door cut in the yew-hedge, which had so roused Theodosia's enthusiasm, to stroll along the river-front and catch the last of the evening light. Opposite, on the other bank of the river, a tent was pitched, and outside it three or four young men were seated, having supper at a tablecloth spread on the grass, and lit by a couple of Chinese lanterns. Their fire for cooking burned bravely on the river edge, and the smell of aromatic wood-smoke was wafted across

to them. It all looked exquisitely simple and uncomplicated. Catherine rather envied that, for her own life just now seemed involved and ravelled; she did not feel confidence in the future. Indeed, she was not sure whether even the next ten minutes would be quite easy, for woman of the world though she was, and conversational engineer, skilled at directing the flow of talk into the channels in which she wished it to run, she felt vaguely nervous with her companion. At dinner he had been the polished, suggestive talker, but it had seemed to her all the time as if he was talking from the surface only, saying the quick, glib things that came so easily to him. And now, when they had separated themselves from the others, she found her impression had been correct.

"It was so good of you to ask me here," he said, "quietly, like this, for it means that you admit me again to friendship and intimacy with you —at least, so I take it."

He struck a match to light his cigarette, holding it in the screen of his hollowed hands, so that the flame illuminated his face very vividly. He had changed extraordinarily little: his dark eyes still had the sparkle of fire and youth in them, and their corners were still unseamed and unwrinkled. His face had grown neither stout nor attenuated; his hair was still untouched by grey, and a plume of it hung, as she had always remembered it, a little apart and over his forehead. He wore neither moustache nor beard, and a very short upper lip separated his large and essentially masculine mouth from a thin, aquiline nose. Then, as he flicked his match away, he threw back his head with the gesture she knew so well.

"Or is that presumptuous of me?" he asked. "I charge you to tell me that, and not let me go on being presumptuous unwittingly."

She laughed.

"It is not in the least presumptuous," she

said. "I ask the whole world to a ball or a big party, since it does not matter who is there, owing to the crowd. But here in the country I ask only the people I want to see, or for some reason have got to see—you are not among the latter—and the more one wants to see of them, the smaller is the party."

"You encourage me," he said. "It is kind of you. Now, my dear lady, we have not seen each other for some time, and though old history is tiresome, I do want to know one thing. Never mind the history, the events, but sum it up for me. Are you happy? Have you been happy?"

She paused a moment. He had a right to know that too.

"Yes, immensely happy," she said with all honestness—"at least, my life suits me, which, I suppose, implies happiness. I am—what is the cant phrase?—in harmony with my environment. And—and you?"

The moment she had asked it she questioned her wisdom in doing so. It gave him, if he chose, a sort of opportunity.

"Ah, well, I have been hard-working and ambitious," he said, "and I have got what I wanted. I suppose one should be content with that. Diplomacy suits me; London suits me; a third thing, indeed, suits me."

"And that?" she asked.

"What you have just so kindly promised me —your friendship. I place it first, I think, not third."

She laughed again, still a little nervously, and conscious of a determination not to let the conversation get more intimate than this. But for the moment it was out of her hands, for he went on in that cool, quiet voice, separating each word from its neighbours, giving to each its individual value.

"People who have once been friends," he said, "and after an interval come together again,

often make a great mistake in wondering and worrying about the past. Please do not suspect me of such a stupidity; I am more than content to take up the present, just as it is, fragrant with the promise of your friendship, and fragrant with the knowledge that you have been, and are, happy. I would have given my whole life, as you know, to make you that, and now that it has come to you without any effort on my part, why, let us rejoice over the economy of my energy."

They had come to the end of the path by the river, where an ironwork gate gave onto the highroad outside, and paused a moment before retracing their steps. A big yellow moon had risen over the trees to the east, so that while the western part of the sky still glowed with sunset, the east was flooded with that cold white flame that turns every colour into ivory or ebony. And this strange effect was reproduced on his face, for the warmth of the west shone on one cheek,

while on the other was the white coldness of the moon. And fantastically enough she felt herself for the moment reading his words in this double light. They seemed capable of two interpretations.

But instantly she told herself that she was utterly unjustified in such a conjecture. His words had been absolutely guileless, nor had she the smallest cause for interpreting them otherwise. What she had done was to read into them the knowledge that twelve years ago she had treated him shabbily, and now credited him with an impulse of revenge. Yet she feared him a little. Beneath his quiet, kind words there was something white-hot and keen-edged. As he had said, he wanted things and got them. What, then, did he want of her? He had told her—her friendship.

It was like him, too, like his consummate cleverness, which it required cleverness to perceive at all, so subtle and natural was it, to say these

strong and serious things about her happiness and her friendship—things which he must know would remain in her mind—and then round off the sentence with a pure triviality about the economy of energy. It gave her, however—as, no doubt, he meant it to do, since he had said his say—an opportunity for altering the direction of the conversation without abrupt transition.

"I really don't know if one ought to rejoice in economy of energy," she said, as they turned to walk back. "There is such an enormous lot of energy in the world, and I think there would be less trouble if it was scarcer. I know I have quite as much as I have any use for. I should find more of it embarrassing."

"You are admirable," he said. "I believe there is never a scheme to help and relieve distress brought before you to which you do not give real support—not the mere buttress of your name, but your time, your pains, your energy.

But, you see, you economise energy in other directions."

"What directions?" she asked.

"Emotional. You never worry, do you? You never regret, you never allow passion of any sort to master and exhaust you."

This, again, was rather more intimate than she liked, yet, somehow, she did not resent it. Perhaps it would be truer to say that she could not resent it, for in his very gentleness there was inherent a strength that made resentment futile. You might as well resent the slow, grinding movement of a glacier. In any case, it would do no good to resent it, and Catherine always set her face against purposeless attitudes.

"No; I don't think I worry much," she said. "But, then, I am very happy. I have little to worry about."

Then suddenly she told herself that she was being afraid of this man, and to her next words

she summoned her courage, asserting herself against him, announcing her independence.

"And certainly I do not often regret," she said. "People talk of destiny as if it was a force outside themselves. If I thought that, no doubt I should often regret the dealings of destiny with me. But I don't, for in almost all important decisions—the things that really make one's life —destiny is nothing more nor less than one's own will. And my will isn't weak, I think."

"I am sure it is not," said he. "But what if the destiny or will of another comes into conflict with yours?"

"Oh, then one has to fight," said she.

"In all your battles, then," said he, "may success ever attend the most deserving!"

She laughed.

"That is ambiguous. That may be a curse, not a blessing, on my arms."

"You think, then, that I am so disloyal as to

be able to imagine even that anyone is more deserving than you?" he asked.

Again he was a little flowery. Her effort had done her good, and she could tell herself that he was even a little fruity.

"You still delight in phrases, I see," she observed.

"In sincere ones," he answered.

They joined the others after this, finding that the millionaire cousin, to his infinite chagrin, had lost seven-and-sixpence, and not long after Catherine suggested adjournment to the women of the party. She herself, for some reason, felt really rather tired, though she had been fresh enough at dinner, and went upstairs immediately and to bed. But sleep, in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of her tiredness, did not soon come to her, and first one thing, then another, held her back from crossing the drowsy borderland. Now it would be the thought of Thurso that pulled her back

into waking consciousness, and the perplexed wonder as to what was the wise step to take about him. You could not play with drugs like that; it was safer to play with loaded guns. Yet he had allowed her to throw that bottle away: his will was his own still. . . . Then her mind took a swift excursion forward into the events of next week. It was crammed from end to end, and she must go up to town quite early on Monday. She was glad it was full; she would have no time for thought. She did not want to think. . . . Then she turned on her side and proceeded to do so.

Why had Rudolf Villars come back to trouble the busy tranquillity of her life? He had said that he had come back—it amounted to that—to resume his friendship with her. But what if she could not give it him—what if friendship was not the word for her with regard to him? She felt quite sure he still loved her—had never ceased to love her. And for herself? No one else had

ever affected her as he did. She felt all she had felt twelve years ago. She resented that; she rebelled against it. Her will, she had asserted, was her destiny; but what if it came into conflict, as he had said, with another will? She was afraid of him, too, or was it of herself that she was afraid?

And he had changed so little! Youthful violence, perhaps, had gone, but the strength of a man had taken its place. If only he had aged in body even!

Round and round in her head went the incessant wheel of thought. She thought of Thurso again, and of the danger in which he stood; she thought of a hundred things, and then she thought of Rudolf Villars again. She could almost hear his voice in her ears.

She had drawn back her curtains, leaving only the blind to cover the wide-open windows, and the moon outside shone full on it, making the furniture and details of her room vividly

visible. The walls were white, the sofas and chairs were white also, and on her dressing-table glimmered the silver of the mirror-frame and the silver handles of brushes and toilet articles. How much or how little, she thought, these commonplace, familiar things might mean! How external sights and sounds and objects could be soaked with emotion, and how, again, they could be just like dry sponges, hard and gritty almost to the touch, dead and fossilised! And all she saw here, in this her bedchamber, was no more than dry sponge; no wine or liquor of love had soaked into those things. All her life, but once for a few short weeks, she had been without it, and how much she had missed she was now unwillingly and rebelliously beginning to guess. 'Arry and 'Arriet in the street, who shouted songs and changed hats, were so infinitely richer than she, in spite of all that was hers—her position, her gifts, her beauty. All these should have been just the trappings and embellishment of the chariot

in which Love rode. Without Love they were nothing—odds and ends, fit for a jumble sale. Once, it is true, she had seen the chariot of Love ready for her, but she had turned back from it, though her foot was on the step. She had been very young; she could not guess how all-important was her choice, and at that age her mother's will rather than her own had been her destiny. But now again she felt sure the chariot was coming to her. What she had rejected before was to be offered her again.

Yet still her will was her destiny, and sooner than play with these thoughts or admit argument about them, she got up, meaning to read a book till sleep came to her. The book she wanted was on the table in the window, and before she lit a candle she crossed the room to get it. The clock on her mantelpiece had just chimed two, and a light shone from under the chink of the door on the left that led to Thurso's dressing-room, so that she knew he was awake still. Also, from outside

she heard the subdued crunch of gravel under the heel of someone who still loitered in the air of this still summer night. And then below his breath someone outside—the loiterer, no doubt—began whistling a plaintive Hungarian folk-tune that she had not heard for years. But that—that untutored little melody was soaked and dripping with emotion for her.

The step passed on round to the door that opened into the garden, and she heard it no more. But she did not, even though she had found her book, care to read, but, gently drawing up the blind, she sat at the open window. The moon had swung to its zenith, and a huge flood of white light was poured on the shrubbery where she had thrown the bottle, and on the lawn and flower-beds; and she sat there long, drinking in the serenity of the cloudless night.

Then the sound of another step, quick but stealthy, came to her ears, and next moment she

saw Thurso crossing the path to the shrubbery. He struck a match, and seemed by its light to be searching eagerly for something. Eventually he found it, and, emerging again, held it up in the moonlight. There was a drop or two still remaining in the bottle, and, turning it upside down, he let them trickle into his mouth.

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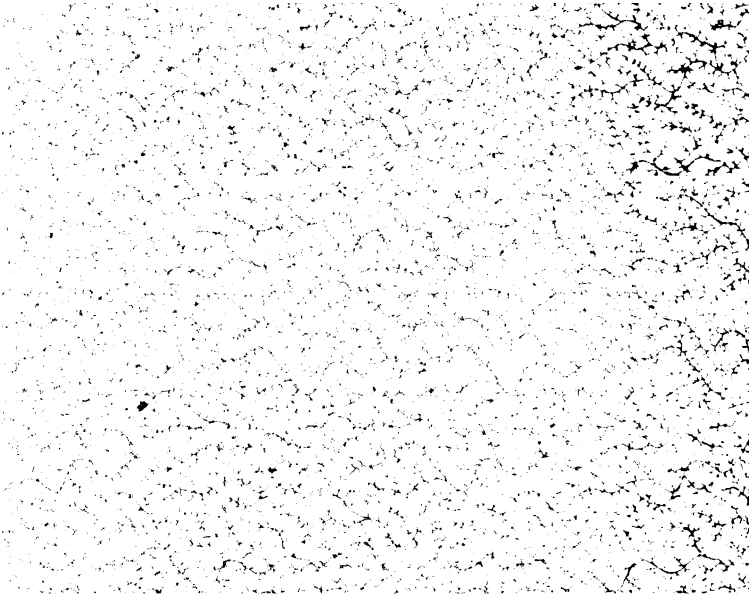

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